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Q

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FOR A SO-CALLED HERITAGE



act, Neil Young currently casts an enormous spell over modern music. Just look at the calibre and breadth of artists queuing up to eulogise Shakey in our comprehensive special on the man: from Bobby Gillespie to Warpaint, Florence Welch to Jake Bugg, they pay handsome tribute to a man whose music has shaped them. Young's own story is fascinating, full of peaks, troughs and fantastic records. That's why we need 21 pages to tell it.

Never shy of measuring himself against the greats, Richard Ashcroft probably feels some kinship with Neil Young. Like the Canadian, he split a fractious group after two albums (unlike Young, he did it again after their third album. And their fourth). He too has since settled into the singer-songwriter groove, about to release his fifth solo album. With compelling honesty and detail he picks through the highs and lows of his career in our cover feature, beginning with The Verve's schooldays and travelling right up to his current guise as a crocodile having his teeth cleaned. We'll let him explain.

Seamlessly moving on to other confident men from the North West: The Stone Roses are (almost) back. We've been sniffing around their studio and talking to their closest confidantes about the new music they've been making. Our intriguing findings begin over the page. Get stuck in. Enjoy the issue.

Matt Mason

MATT MASON, SENIOR EDITOR (@MattMason_)

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[...And their favourite Neil number...]

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Q THE MONTH IN MUSIC

IF IT MATTERS,
IT'S HERE.

ROSES IN BLOOM

THE STONE ROSES

are back in the studio readying music to coincide with their live shows in June. Band biographer Simon Spence spoke to those closest to the Roses to discover the story behind their long-awaited new material.

In a scene unimaginable five years ago, Ian Brown, confronted outside the Church Studios in Crouch End on 24 March, confirmed that The Stone Roses were recording new material. Excitement had started five days earlier when fans tweeted images of the band's equipment sat outside the studios and there had been several camera-phone shots of various band members coming and going in the intervening days. Beaming, Brown said the music sounded "glorious" and would be released "soon". The notoriously tight-lipped band revealed little else.

Speculation that a new Stone Roses album was imminent went into overdrive. With nothing official to report, snatched

conversations with fans, claims from unnamed sources and cryptic comments from Noel Gallagher all filled the vacuum and the news pages. It was clear this was a major story but the band's circle of trust remained impossible to breach.

For many, though, the news that all four Roses were together recording new material was enough. It had been five years since the surprise 2011 reunion of the Manchester icons and the first promise of a new album as guitarist John Squire stated that he and Brown had already begun writing new songs together. The band had even announced they had signed two record deals, one with Columbia for America and the other with Universal for the UK and the rest of the world. Brown, encouragingly, had called the



ANDREW BROWN/DAMIAN MCCOY/ILLUMINATIONS



"Sorry, mate, I don't have any change... Oh, it's you John."
The Stone Roses (minus Reni) pose for pictures outside Church Studios, North London, 25 March, 2016.

new songs "pure psychedelic pop" and the band "the last of the beatniks".

However, since the end of the year-long run of reunion shows in the late summer of 2013, there had followed only a prolonged period of silence accompanied by persistent rumours that they had broken up again over entrenched personal differences. Shane Meadows's 2013 documentary *Made Of Stone* suggested the band had come perilously close to splitting prior to their hometown gigs at Heaton Park after Brown had called drummer Reni "a cunt" onstage at a show in Amsterdam. Many presumed the band was simply too dysfunctional now to ever recapture their magic in the studio. It was even suggested that they were trying to get out of their record deals.

The truth was a little more humdrum – the delay was down to several personal factors. In May 2015, Brown's younger sister had died after a relatively short struggle with cancer. Both Squire and bassist Mani (twins) were new fathers. It was entirely reasonable to expect men in their 50s to take time off in these circumstances after playing almost 50 dates around the world. Several sources have revealed to Q that Brown's relationship with Reni was not particularly close but that they both realised, for the sake of the band, they needed to rub along professionally.

Still, they were here now and the key question was what the four men had managed to cook up in the studio. There were few clues. There were strong suggestions that the band had been working with John Leckie,

who had produced the band's 1989 debut album as well as sessions for its notoriously protracted follow-up, *Second Coming*. "The answer is... no," the producer revealed to Q after Brown's revelations in March. "All I know is what I've got from the internet. They are in Church Studios, probably with Paul Epworth. I'm sure it will be magnificent."

Nor, it seems, will the band be returning to the Led Zeppelin-influenced sound of *Second Coming*. Over Christmas 2015, Brown had been singing one of the band's new songs while strumming the acoustic he'd become adept at playing to one of his best friends, Simon Wolstencroft. Brown had helped Wolstencroft, the Roses' original drummer who went on to play with The Smiths and The Fall, write the early chapters of his memoir. The two had been at school together and played in a school band that was a precursor to the Roses. Wolstencroft said he had been called "a bum" by Reni for writing in his book that *Love Spreads* was the only decent tune on *Second Coming*. "Ian said, 'You know, Si, you were right, *Love Spreads* was the only good tune on the album.'" Wolstencroft reveals.

Brown also mentioned to Wolstencroft the fact that producer Paul Epworth had expressed an interest in producing the Roses.

Wolstencroft said Brown was upbeat and striving to get things moving with the Roses. "Mad keen," he said. The singer had been frustrated by the lack of drive from his bandmates. "He was raring to go," Wolstencroft said. "Ian was always the one pushing to record and do more gigs. He is, after all, a performer." The band had been rehearsing since the autumn of 2015 and it had been going well. "Ian was really happy," Wolstencroft said. He felt the band had to get something released before they played the four nights at the vast 60,000-capacity Etihad stadium, home to Manchester City FC, in June 2016.

Wolstencroft didn't know if the song Brown had played him was by Squire/Brown, self-penned or a group effort. Squire and Brown had written songs together as far back as 2011 when Brown had called the work "more important than the reunion shows." >>



On the case: two fans find a massive clue to who might be working inside.

Mani with young fan William Brown outside Church Studios in March.

It remained unclear if these songs were based on unreleased Squire instrumentals leaked onto the internet in 2010 or included the track Squire had sent Brown for possible inclusion on his 2009 album, *My Way*. It was entirely possible these songs may have been scrapped altogether in favour of more recent inspiration or radically reworked. Brown, who in 2010 admitted he had been finding it difficult to write songs for his seventh solo album, had subsequently rediscovered his songwriting spark. Reni's former manager, John Nuttall, had also suggested that Reni's own self-penned songs could make their way into the mix.

In late 2015, rumours started to circulate about a new album being released before the Etihad dates. Noel Gallagher told a TV interviewer that the band was "blooming". At a New Order gig in November Mani had told a fan that the band's new songs were "fantastic". The rumours continued to gather pace in early 2016. Sources as diverse as the BBC and fan online forum Don't Stop speculated that the band had already slipped into the studio to record an album and there was media speculation – without a word from the band – about a projected release date of 4 March. The Guardian, NME, The Sun and Daily Mirror were among scores of outlets reporting on what turned out to be a non-event. Nothing happened. What was going on? "That's the million-dollar question," Reni told a fan who had stopped him on the street in Manchester to ask.

Reni was the first band member spotted entering Church Studios. "I am recording," he told a fan who asked if the band were recording new material. Nuttall tells Q Reni texted him to confirm he was in the studio with the band and was clearly excited. It seemed unlikely they had recorded an LP in secret and simply gone into Church to add overdubs and mix it as some suggested. Nor would they be releasing a full LP before June. Brown had responded to a fan by saying new material would "hopefully" be out by then.

The Stone Roses spent just over a week on/off in Church Studios and the sensible money was on the band being there to record tracks for a possible single or EP to be released to coincide with the much-anticipated Etihad gigs. Even for a band without The Stone Roses' reputation for procrastination, it is improbable any major act would have cut an album in such a short space of time,

with a plan to release it less than three months away. "Then again, Otis Blue was recorded in 32 hours," Nuttall added. This being the Roses, the safest thing was not to rule anything out.

That Paul Epworth is involved in producing the new material is true. He owns The Church studio complex the band were recording in, electronic duo Cardboard Foxes posted a picture of the producer stood with Brown at the mixing desk and his sister, singer Mary Epworth, confirmed as much on Facebook. Perhaps more spuriously, fan rumours circulated that one new song Mantis was a 10-minute psychedelic groove featuring a funk bassline and phased guitar solos.

Simon Wolstencroft had been certain the new material would continue in the vein of Brown's solo work and be groove-based, speculating that it could include strings, the material moving toward the vein of The Verve's *Bitter Sweet Symphony*.

"I could tell from the way Ian was speaking and acting outside the studio that what they have recorded must be belting," he said. Noel Gallagher also revealed that he had recently bumped into the singer while shopping in the supermarket. "They're going to play some new songs," he told the NME in April. "I bumped into Ian in a supermarket recently... He was telling me how excited they are by it all. He said it was like they were making their first record again."

As borne out by the reaction of fans and the media, the anticipation for new songs from The Stone Roses now eclipses even the excruciating five-and-a-half-year wait for *Second Coming*. Only time will tell if the life-affirming force the band once so gloriously distilled on record has been repeated. Given the euphoria that met their 2012 shows, if – as Brown had stated at the band's reunion press conference – the new music turned out to be "more important than the reunion shows", it would be no mean feat.

■ *Simon Spence is the author of The Stones Roses: War And Peace (Penguin)*

**"IT WILL BE
MAGNIFICENT."
JOHN LECKIE**

THE THIRD COMING

The road to the new Stone Roses record.

APRIL 2010

Brown reveals that John Squire had tried to end their lengthy feud by writing him a song to collaborate on. "Pretty good, sounded nice, I liked it," Brown said.

18 OCTOBER 2011

At their reunion press conference Squire claims that, after meeting for the first time in 15 years at the funeral of Mani's mother, he and Brown "went from crying and laughing about the old days to writing songs in a heartbeat".

29 OCTOBER 2011

Brown described the new songs as "pure psychedelic pop". He qualifies this with: "It's way too early to describe the sound properly, but be sure that we're aiming for classics."

JULY 2012

In Singapore a fan asks Squire if there will be a new studio album: "Yeah, definitely." How far along was it? "Just need to do the sleeve and it's ready," he deadpans. In Japan he tells another fan: "We're not going to record a whole album. We will do it like we did the first record... go in there when we're ready to do 'em."

OCTOBER 2012

Asked what the new album would sound like, Squire responds: "What album? We are working on songs but there's no album yet."

MAY 2013

At the Manchester premiere of the Shane Meadows-directed Stone Roses documentary *Made Of Stone*, Squire tells the press: "We've got a few new songs."

We're working on it this year."

SEPTEMBER 2013

At a Tim Burgess gig, Mani states the Roses have been "working on a few bits". Cajoled for an album release date, he replies: "2015 man, 2015!"

MAY 2014

Rumours circulate that the Roses are preparing to split up. A unnamed insider claims: "Trying to recreate the magic between four very different entities, as compared to their earlier incarnation, just didn't work."

OCTOBER 2015

The BBC report that, at a Dynamo show, Ian Brown states the band "are in the studio working on new material".

NOVEMBER 2015

The band announce summer 2016 dates. Bookmakers list them as early favourites to win the 2016 Mercury Prize award for best UK album.

MARCH 2016

Fans spot the band's equipment outside the Church Studios. Ian Brown confirms the band is recording new material.

APRIL 2016

Noel Gallagher claims the band will play the new songs live and that Brown had told him recording new material "was like they were making their first record again".



He EQs the drums... new Stone Roses producer Paul Epworth.

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MARLEY

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THE HORIZON

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BREAKBOT GREGORY PORTER

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It's likely UK grime star **STORMZY** is too busy finishing his debut LP and getting Nando's burgers named after him to do England's Euro 2016 song...

H i, Stormzy, where are you?

I'm in Germany for the Adidas Global Conference. I'm doing a little performance for them.

Do they tell you what they want from you, or does that defeat the point of booking Stormzy?

I wouldn't take a booking where I couldn't do what I'd like to, know what I mean?

If you're booking me, surely you're booking me for what I do. It's always on my terms.

You recently teased your album with a new song, Scary, on social media.

The album's out in the summer. It's all going good. I wanted to start a flood of music from now until the album – that's just a snippet of a track I don't even think will make the album.

That track's not going to be on the album?

That's the worst album teaser ever!

It's more of an *indication* for the album. I've been recording so much music.

You're rumoured to be on the England Euro 2016 song. Is that happening?

Betfair put me on at 18/1 to be doing it, then people started saying I'd already made the song! But I'd definitely do it. It would be too sick an opportunity to miss. This is why I love social media: you can watch a story grow and change. The other day I got a call from my mate going "Congrats!" I was like, "What for?" He said he'd heard I'd be the new judge on The X Factor. Crazy!

You've got a part in [actor/director/former Dr Who sidekick] Noel Clarke's upcoming Brotherhood film. How would you describe your character?

He's calm. He's a serious guy. He's part of a little gang that's causing trouble. He's a

bit jokey but can get serious. He's a bit like me, I suppose, but he's more menacing.

Nando's created what they called the #Merky burger in your honour. Halloumi in garlic bread sounds nice, but was it as tasty as you'd hoped?

That was a joke that went a bit too far, but so many people were going in and asking for them that basically some of the restaurants had to start making them.

According to a piece in the Croydon Advertiser, you once worked in Leamington Spa. What can you tell me about the grime scene in Leamington Spa?

I worked there for just under a year, but as far as anyone knew I was just "Mike the project control apprentice". I'd be up there five days a week. Some weekends I'd come down to London, but I never told them I was an MC – apart from one guy, but he had to keep it a secret.

Will we be hearing any more from your slow-jam-bothering alter-ego, Stiff Chocolate?

One hundred per cent! I've got a tune with smooth, R&B undertones. Stormzy isn't just [breakthrough freestyle] Shut Up, he likes spilling his heart out too. I need to let the world know what they're buying into before I go out and conquer.

Are you still unsigned?

Yeah, I am, and I'm putting out the album independently. We're shooting for the stars! I feel like I owe it to myself to put it out independently, to do this by ourselves. We got here. This is a big part of the initial stage before we go on to conquer the world.

PETER ROBINSON

“BETFAIR PUT ME 18/1 TO DO THE ENGLAND EURO 2016 SONG. I'D DEFINITELY DO IT!”

This is a squall: Stormzy prepares to “conquer the world”



MISREPRESENTATION

The revelation that the recent Miles Davis film wouldn't have been made without a white co-star highlights Hollywood's worrying race problem, argues Dorian Lynskey.



Miles Ahead, the new movie starring and directed by Don Cheadle, is an impressionistic portrait of Miles

Davis in the late 1970s, looking back on his life while getting into scrapes with Scottish Rolling Stone reporter Dave Braden, played by Ewan McGregor. The man who revolutionised jazz time and again needs no introduction but you probably haven't heard of Braden. That's because Braden didn't exist. He was conjured up out of pure financial necessity.

"Until Ewan came on, until we had cast a white co-star, there was no Miles Davis movie," Cheadle told actual Rolling Stone journalist David Fear. "The family had been trying to make this movie for years, and we straight-up told them... 'We need to tell this story, in order to get this money, with a white male lead.'"

Fear said this was incredibly depressing.

"That's the reality," Cheadle replied. "It's called movie-making."

It's no secret that Hollywood has a race problem. At this year's Academy Awards, the second in a row to feature no nominees of colour in the acting categories, host Chris Rock made hay with the controversy around the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag. Stories like Cheadle's vividly illustrate why there aren't enough meaty roles for black actors.

The imbalance is even more glaring when

movies depict musicians. Popular music is unimaginable without its pioneering black stars but Hollywood tends to treat their blackness as a problem. The culprit, it seems, is the international market. Tate Taylor, director of 2014's slept-on James Brown biopic *Get On Up*, told me that he struggled to secure financing for the movie because conventional wisdom said that African-American stories didn't travel well. (True enough, *Get On Up* grossed \$30m in the US but less than \$3m internationally.) Cheadle, while having nothing but praise for McGregor, has said that he was told to secure an "international" co-star: a euphemism for "white". "Me and my team knew what was being said, although it was not actually being said," he told US politics website Salon.

This spring also sees the long-delayed release of *Nina*, the Nina Simone biopic that's been getting bad press ever since the tone-deaf casting of Zoe Saldana four years ago. Simone's most intense work drew on the struggle between pride and self-loathing inside a woman who was often made to feel that her face didn't fit. "I'm the kind of coloured girl who looks like everything white people despise or have been taught to despise," she wrote in her diary. To cast an actress as light-skinned and beautiful as Saldana, only to darken her skin with make-up

and add a prosthetic nose, is to slice away a huge part of what made Simone the artist she was, to buy into the structural racism that she spent a lifetime fighting, and to send the message that if Simone



Colour bind: Don Cheadle and Ewan McGregor in *Miles Ahead*.

POPULAR MUSIC IS UNIMAGINABLE WITHOUT BLACK STARS BUT HOLLYWOOD TREATS THEIR BLACKNESS AS A PROBLEM.

were still alive she couldn't even get cast as herself. The singer's family has called the decision "gut-wrenching, heartbreaking, nauseating, soul-crushing".

We know that Hollywood is built on compromise. Film-makers regularly give ground on casting, budget and even plot points in order to get their movies made. Don Cheadle felt that fabricating a white sidekick was a concession worth making and his acclaimed performance as Davis suggests he was right. But in the case of *Nina* it might have been better to have no movie than one which, however good it may turn out to be, fundamentally flies in the face of what its subject stood for. Most musicians only get one bite of the biopic cherry. If it works, like it

did with Johnny Cash and *Walk The Line*, the artist looms larger in the cultural imagination for years to come. But if the story is botched, then it's going to be a very long time before someone tries again.

Perhaps change is gonna come to Hollywood in the wake of last year's surprise blockbuster *Straight Outta Compton*. For all its clichés and pulled punches, the *NWA* movie told a very important, very black story and grossed over \$200 million worldwide, including \$40m outside the US. Nothing changes minds in the movie business like money. So the next time someone makes a film about a legendary black musician, maybe it will be one that isn't forced to apologise for its blackness.



Nina Simone (above) and Zoe Saldana (right) who plays her in a controversial biopic.

MUST KNOW

TITLE: Ape In Pink Marble
DUE: Autumn 2016
PRODUCERS: Devendra Banhart, Noah Georgeson, Josiah Steinbrick
RECORDED: Banhart's front garden, Echo Park, LA
SONGS: Lucky, Saturday Night, Jon Lends A Hand, Lonely Woman, Eviction Party, Anonymous Boy Constellation
FASCINATING FACT: One of the LP's guitar solos was played by Banhart's friend Mel who'd never picked up a guitar before.

"Yes, it's totally true what they say about big feet..."
 Devendra Banhart, Los Angeles, 7 April, 2016.

MAN IN A SHED

Former freak folkie **DEVENDRA BANHART** decamped to his front garden to record an album of "lobby music for a 1980s Japanese hotel".

Up a winding staircase in the LA hills is a pair of tan sandals and an open door. "Would you mind removing your shoes?" asks Devendra Banhart, ushering Q into his apartment. Not only has the Venezuelan-American singer spent the last 18 months at home working on his upcoming ninth LP, *Ape In Pink Marble*, but the one-time freak-folk poster boy has been doing some DIY. "These are planks from Home Depot I painted white," he beams, showing off the floorboards in his bare feet, which are tattooed with the sort of images you'd see on the walls of an Egyptian pyramid.

Although his once unruly hair and beard are now neatly trimmed, Banhart's inked feet are a reminder of the image he projected when he broke through in 2005, a scarecrow-like jumble of beads, bindis and eyeliner

singing whimsical psych-folk about the woods, wolves and wanting to have "Chinese children". "When I signed to XL, there was a sign in the office that said: 'A good hippy is a dead hippy.' There I was in turquoise bell-bottoms, no shirt and feather earrings. I thought, 'Fuck yeah, I'm scum of the earth to these guys,'" he recalls with a laugh.

Although 2013's *Mala* owed as much to '50s doo-wop and tropicalia as it did to Marc Bolan's early hippy strummings, it's an image that's been something of an albatross around

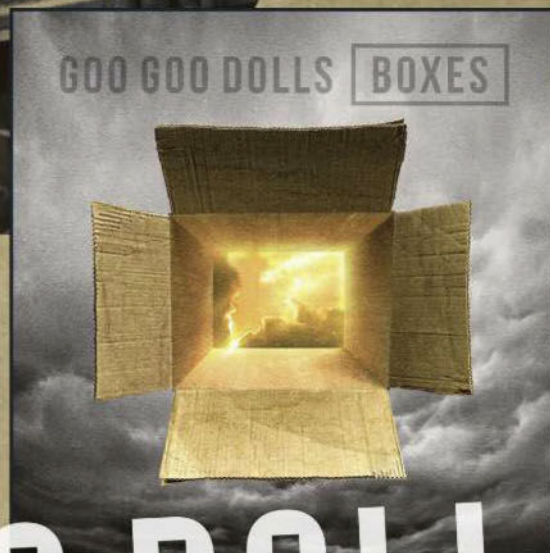
"FOUR FATHERS WHO WERE VERY CLOSE TO ME DIED LAST YEAR."

his well-decorated neck. *Ape In Pink Marble* marks another evolution for Banhart. He hops across the room to play the record's influences – drone works by ambient classicists Harold Budd and Stephan Micus.

After writing songs in his front room, he decamped to his garden shed with producers Josiah Steinbrick and Noah Georgeson (Cate Le Bon, Charlotte Gainsbourg) to record the LP he self-deprecatingly describes as "lobby music for a 1980s Japanese hotel".

Sparse and meditative, the record is built around acoustic guitar, old battered synths and Japanese harp. One track *Jon Lends A Hand* is a chipper love song about nicking Jonathan Richman's chords to tell a girl how beautiful she is. *Saturday Night* is a lo-fi soul number that recalls *Danger Mouse* and *Sparklehorse's* bittersweet *Dark Night Of The Soul* collaboration. *Lonely Woman* is a gorgeous wash of harp and crackling vocals inspired by the recent deaths of several people close to him. "Four fathers who were very close to me died last year," he says. "One of them was my biological father. You gain a new sensitivity, but also an abyss of sorrow."

A board propped up by Banhart's window reveals a list of abandoned titles for the LP, including *Virgin Boy Eggs* and *A Fish Taco In Chrome*. "Covered in chrome!" he smiles. "Glistening like the [comic book hero] Silver Surfer." Despite his shifting sound, Banhart's eccentricities remain intact. *EVE BARLOW*



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**“IF TRUMP
BECOMES
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TO CANADA.”**

labels. “In 1989, I sat across from ‘the new head of Epic,’” she begins. Lauper, it turns out, has a wonderful knack for placing audible quote marks around phrases she finds displeasing. “And the ‘new head of Epic’ goes: ‘Why can’t you dress like Katrina & The Waves?’ I was like, ‘I’m DIFFERENT to her!’ I couldn’t do it. I’d rather jump off the ladder.”

It’s not hard to see why she’s relishing her creative freedom now. Lauper’s latest opportunity came while on tour with Cher, thanks to US music biz legend Seymour Stein. “He said, ‘You could sing anything,’ I thought, ‘Maybe.’” Plans were hatched for a country LP, which Stein would release on Sire: “When I heard that I could get together with some of the guys from Muscle Shoals I thought, ‘I’m in.’”

Food arrives: Cyndi’s ordered soup, a goat’s cheese salad and eggplant Parmesan. “I think I got too much,” she decides, surveying the generous portions. “I said LITTLE!” While she pokes at her food we chat about her next project (a possible stage version of the ’80s film *Working Girl*), her son (now 18, he’s making forays into hip-hop) and her upcoming Glastonbury appearance (“FINALLY!”).

She’s less enthusiastic about a potential Trump presidency, having dealt with him at close quarters during a stint on *Celebrity Apprentice*. Lauper was fired because she was too honest. “He didn’t want me to stick up for the workers,” she recalls. “If he becomes President,” she adds, “I’ll move to Canada.”

By this point, Lauper has eaten around half her soup, a decent amount of aubergine and none of the goat’s cheese salad. As our waiter fetches the bill, she considers her 32-year solo career. “It’s funny,” she smiles. “Once you become famous, you’re afraid of *everything*. Every decision, people around you go, ‘You’ll be RUINED!’ But once you’ve got so many nails in your coffin, you don’t give a shit any more. What are you gonna tell me, that I’m gonna fail? Been there, done that. I don’t give a shit. I will do what I *can* do, before I drop dead. I could do any fucking thing I want.”

With which Cyndi – and her pink cloud – vanish from the restaurant. Three decades in, you sense there’s still plenty of unfinished business. **PETER ROBINSON**

*Let’s
Do Lunch
With...*



CYNDI LAUPER

Over eggplant Parmesan, pop’s Queen Of The “Unusual” talks about why she’s still here after 30 years of being told she’ll fail.

S trolling past West London’s Locanda Ottoemesso, it’s impossible to miss this afternoon’s lunch date: Cyndi Lauper’s the one attached to a cloud of bright pink hair that bobs around in the window, and she’s already ordering food when Q arrives. “Have a Cynar!” she suggests, signalling to the waiter that another drink should be brought to the table. Plumping for a bon mot favoured by many an afternoon drinker, she adds: “It’s an *aperitif*!”

Cyndi confesses to being “a little all over the place” this afternoon – she’s been in town two days and has already performed at the Olivier Awards (her musical, *Kinky Boots*, won three awards) and flung herself into a whirlwind of interviews surrounding her new country LP, *Detour*. And only a few days ago she was in New York performing at a Bowie tribute concert. She’d signed up last year, only for the event to take on a rather different form in January. She sighs. “You’d think he was going one way, then he’d make the left turn. He’d *always* make the fucking left turn.”

Lauper’s career is not without its own left turns, not to mention some swerves and near

misses. Following a short spell in New York rockabilly act Blue Angel, her breakout solo hit came with a tune that started life as what she tells Q was a “crazy-assed sexist song” which she demanded be changed before she sang it. “It was a guy singing, ‘We are the fortunate ones, cos girls just wanna have fun,’” Lauper reports with an eye roll. “In the end I put every race of girl I could in that video, so every girl could watch that video, see herself and know she was entitled to a joyful, no-bullshit experience in life.”

Things weren’t quite so easy for Lauper. Her record-breaking debut LP *She’s So Unusual* made her a global star, but her unusualness proved confusing for record

**CAN I
TAKE YOUR
ORDER, MS
LAUPER?**



Favourite restaurant?

“Bouley in New York. I used to take my son when he was little.”

Culinary speciality?

“I’m trying to be a vegetarian, so lentils.”

Favourite dish?

“Eggplant Parmesan, when it’s done right.”

Most hated food stuff?

“MEAT.”

Dream dining companion?

“A great chef, who’d cook.”

Brown sauce or ketchup?

“On what? [*Pulls face*] NEITHER!”

Death Row dinner?

“I don’t believe in those. You gotta eat that shit now!”





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QINTRODUCES



BLOSSOMS

Inspired by violent video games and Britpop, Stockport lads mix indie anthems with glittering synth-pop.

Immensely popular, car-pinching shoot-'em-up Grand Theft Auto has been accused of many things. Moral guardians have attacked its ultra-violence and glamourising of the narcotic and sex trade, not to mention its flagrant disregard for the norms of vehicle ownership. Yet without the video game, Stockport's Blossoms

would probably sound very different. But rather than inspire any nefarious behaviour, GTA's Vice City and its soundtrack, featuring the likes of Lionel Richie, Hall & Oates and Luther Vandross, has been a key factor in shaping the band's musical outlook, adding a synth-y sheen to their hook-laden indie pop. "All that '80s disco on the Vice City soundtrack has subconsciously gone in," admits

shaggy-haired frontman Tom Ogden as he shuffles into the Shepherdess café in East London with bassist Charlie Salt, drummer Joe Donovan, guitarist Josh Dewhurst and keyboardist Myles Kellock.

Having first come together in 2013 at a practice room tucked away on a scaffolding yard owned by Salt's grandfather and taking their name from a local boozer on the A6, the neo-romantics' bright, digital sparkle is underpinned by a strong Northern swagger.

"I think we fuse a disco sound with that euphoria that Oasis had," suggests Ogden. "Growing up they were my favourite band, so the big choruses and songs to

put your arms round your mates or your girlfriend or whatever have definitely sunk in."

Recent single Charlemagne best showcases that particular cross-pollination. A bounding, sing-along anthem you can dance to, it has hints of Suede's decadent flouncing among its 808 clicks and Gallagher-like choruses. With its additional distinction of being a love song that name-checks the first Holy Roman Emperor, it's no surprise that progressive-pop-maker James Skelly from The Coral quickly recognised Blossoms as fellow travellers and offered to produce them before they even had a record deal.



Heavy petal music: Blossoms (from left, Josh Dewhurst, Charlie Salt, Tom Ogden, Joe Donovan and Myles Kellock), East London, 30 March, 2016.

> In a nutshell:
Synth-pop hooks mashed with an indie-disco swagger.

> For fans of:
Suede, Oasis, Duran Duran

> Get this track:
Charlemagne

"He's been like our Jedi master," says Ogden of the singer's work on their upcoming self-titled debut. "You can hear Charlemagne and might not think the guy from The Coral would produce that, but he's a massive part of it. He wanted us to sound as modern as possible. Though that may be causing him some problems at home. He played our songs to his wife and she went: 'Why don't you write songs like Blossoms? I really like them!'"

The Coral are not the only heroes to have given the band an approving nod. Ian Brown and Mani told Blossoms they're fans, as did a certain former Smiths guitarist. They think.

"I saw Johnny Marr in the Arndale Centre," grins Ogden, uttering what might be the most Mancunian sentence ever. "We approached him and he went: 'You've got that great pop record out, haven't you?' I think he meant Charlemagne, unless he thinks we're someone else..."

Once the LP is finished their next aim is to equal fellow Stockport native, tennis player and polo shirt king Fred Perry who has a blue plaque in the town square. "You have to be dead to get a plaque, so we don't want one too soon," says Ogden. Blossoms shouldn't have to wait for that to join the list of Stockport's most famous sons. **PAUL STOKES**

ANNE-MARIE

Rudimental vocalist swaps martial arts and musical theatre for gobby dance-pop.

B arrelling into her management offices, 25-year-old pop wildcard Anne-Marie looks like she's just crashed through a jumble sale clothes rail; Adidas sandals and socks clash with a pink fur coat and oversized sunglasses. This haphazard attempt at Parisian chic – finished off with a jaunty black beret – is punctured by her thick Essex accent. "I can't keep my mouth shut," she warns.

Anne-Marie Nicholson's scattershot approach to couture is mimicked by her personality-led pop, which has so far taken in minimalist R&B (Karate), horn-infused future-funk (the cheeky gaydar parable of Boy) and the cautionary narrative of Rihanna-like banger Alarm. "It's about a boy who was with someone else, then we got together and he left her," she says. "I was constantly thinking, 'You could do that to me'." While her one-word review of Alarm's "wild boy" can't be repeated, she admits to being drawn to the allure of bad guys. "They mug you off and you're like, 'Fuck you, I hate you, but I still want to be with you'."

In a pop world that favours media training over personality, Anne-Marie's candour is refreshing. It's no surprise that as a kid her parents strove to keep her permanently busy. Weekly singing and dancing lessons from the age of two resulted in West End roles in *Les Misérables* and alongside a pre-fame Jessie J in *Whistle Down The Wind*. Bored by the restrictions of singing in a specific style, she made the seamless move into karate, winning two international championships by the age of 17.

Running parallel to all the controlled aggression was a love of music, fostered by childhood obsessions with Christina Aguilera and Eminem. A stint in a Motown tribute band led to a chance encounter with a songwriter looking for a vocalist to bring her songs to life. When the songs reached Elton John's Rocket Music management, Anne-Marie was snapped up.

Today she's worried she may have overstepped the mark with the boss: "Elton called me up and at the end of the conversation I was like, 'Yeah, love you'," she cringes. "I just put the phone down."

Having honed her skills as part of dance music collective Rudimental (she appears on four songs on their most recent album), Anne-Marie's confident she can hold her own in pop's crowded market. "I don't look at people on the same level as me, I look at Beyoncé. Right to the top. Why not?" Watch your backs, superstars. **MICHAEL CRAGG**

Cock-a-hoop: Anne-Marie isn't hanging around.





Dutch courage:
Amber Arcades,
aka Annelotte
de Graaf.

AMBER ARCADES

Meet the Dutch human rights lawyer who ploughed her life's savings into her music.

Rock'n'roll is traditionally a haven for spontaneous and recklessly carefree souls rather than the prudent and thrifty. "I started saving at 16," says Annelotte de Graaf. "When I started I figured it was going to be to travel or something. But then it never really happened because I was studying all the time. Then I finished studying and I got into music and I figured I'd like to make a record with my savings."

Currently sat in bed with her cat nursing a cold in Utrecht, Holland, de Graaf is better known as Amber Arcades whose dreamy yet fuzzed-up first album *Fading Lines* proves it was a wise investment. A flawless set of richly melodic songs that combine the yearning choruses of lovelorn Canadians *Alvvays*, Broadcast's floaty Krautpop and the wispy guitars of *Real Estate*.

If it's rare to find a rock star who has been diligently saving up to make an album since her teens, it's surely rarer still to find one who combines her successful musical career with a job as

a legal assistant at Holland's immigration centre. "I've learned not to take it home with me," she says of her day job reviewing applications for asylum. "I wouldn't say I'm numb to it, but I already worked at the UN tribunal for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia so I'm used to human sorrow."

It was while studying law that de Graaf pursued her musical ambitions. During an exchange programme in

Philadelphia she saw a possibility to reinvent herself and focus more on music. So she bought a mandolin and joined "a bunch of punk kids who were starting this bluegrass band" playing covers.

Fading Lines carries little evidence of this bluegrass period, but its sound does owe something to her thriftiness which helped her secure the talents of Ben Greenberg from New York noise punks *The Men*. When de Graaf totted up her savings she realised she had enough to get a proper producer.

"A friend of mine said, 'You should go for the one who challenges you the most,' and I figured Ben was the guy to do that."

Despite her growing success, Q wonders what de Graaf's mum had to say about the way she chose to spend her savings. "She thinks it's amazing," she says, sensibly noting that her law training will be there later to fall back on "when I have more responsibilities." This girl's out of control. **LAURA BARTON**

"WITH MY
JOB, I'M USED
TO HUMAN
SORROW."

INCOMING



This month, Q's Chris Catchpole expands his mind to the tune of some virtual clubbing, fuzzy power pop, avant-rock, Princely R&B and country heartbreak.



LEON VYNEHALL • BEAU SOVEREIGN

Sussex-based producer Leon Vynehall sequenced his forthcoming album *Rojus* to mirror a night out clubbing. Given *Beau Sovereign*'s trance-inducing mix of breathy vocals and deep Chicago house is only track three you wonder what the hell else the record is meant to soundtrack. Unsuccessfully trying to locate the night bus?
Hear it: Via SoundCloud now.

CAR SEAT HEADREST FILL IN THE BLANK

Despite having one of the most uninspiring stage names in recent memory, Virginian songwriter Will Toledo has been an impressively prolific source of excellent bedroom-made indie rock, releasing 12 albums since 2010. Taken from his first LP made in a real-life recording studio, *Fill In The Blank* is a dizzyingly melodic blast of fuzzy power pop.
Hear it: Via YouTube now.

MITSKI HAPPY

Fans of St Vincent's futurist art rock should investigate the second album, *Puberty 2*, by Japanese-American singer Mitski. Opening track *Happy* is

a beguiling mix of swooping vocals, parping sax and what sounds like a washing machine hitting the spin cycle.

Hear it: Via Dead Oceans on 17 June.

A.K. PAUL LANDCRUISIN'

Mysterious producer Jai Paul briefly broke cover several years ago with two brilliant tracks. An LP appeared, which Jai subsequently claimed was "a fake" before disappearing again. *Landcruisin'* is the debut single by his brother A.K. Following a similarly warped R&B path to A.K.'s sibling, it's a robo-hybrid of all Prince's best bits bookended by someone revving a motorbike.

Hear it: Via The Paul Institute now.

MARGO PRICE SINCE YOU PUT ME DOWN

Dad lost the farm, the death of her child, jail, pawning her wedding ring to get to Nashville... given Margo Price's backstory is straight from a Loretta Lynn song, it's a stroke of luck she pursued a career as a country singer. Replete with weeping pedal steel and hillbilly fiddle, *Since You Put Me Down* follows the tried and tested genre trope of fixing a broken heart with copious amounts of hard drinking.

Hear it: Via Third Man.



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THE SUNDAY NIGHT MUSIC CLUB

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"Masters of their craft."
Danielle with Muse's (from left)
Matt Bellamy and Dominic Howard.

SURROUND SOUNDS

Sunday Night Music Club host **Danielle Perry** enjoys two of the most immersive music experiences of the month.

What a great time of year spring is. The sun suddenly feels a little warmer (forget the snow we had on the 16 April) and the festivals

are beginning to release their full line-ups. It feels like a lot of the music industry are stepping out from the shadows, ready for the summer.

There's lots to be getting on with over the next few weeks too – even if the weather doesn't hold. I was lucky enough to go to the Gala Opening Night of Exhibitionism recently. The

immersive Rolling Stones exhibition is currently holding court at the Saatchi Gallery in West London. It's a fascinating insight into the world and life of a Rolling Stone: the sights, the sounds, the contracts, the stages. From their very first concert to a 3D viewing experience taken from their 2013 Hyde Park show, it's a journey that reawakens the soul and you walk out feeling very proud of a band that formed in our fine capital back in 1962 and went on to become one of our most cherished acts. It's a great experience, believe me. And it runs until the 4 September.

I even had Mick Jagger on the show talking me through the

exhibition – you can listen to it again on the Q website right now. He was a gent. Instead of getting his manager or PR aficionado to connect the call to me while he was out in Mexico preparing for the Stones' show in Cuba – which many artists would do – he instead phoned me, on time, all on his own. Twenty minutes later I could confidently tell you that he is generous, gregarious and still holds an air of intrigue down a telephone line. He's a Brit through and through, I'd love to go for a pint with him.

Another highlight of the last month was legging it over to the O2 to speak to Muse ahead of the fourth and final night of their "Drones" residency. I've only ever chatted to bassist Chris Wolstenholme before on the phone, so I was really looking forward to chewing the fat with Matt Bellamy and Dominic

Howard. I'd seen the live show already and was incredibly impressed – I'd find it hard to believe someone who said they weren't to be honest. They're masters of their craft but they're also really normal, you'll be glad to hear. Charming, interesting and full of ideas – some pretty out there and some safe for broadcast. You can hear the documentary I host – *Muse: Backstage At The Drones Tour* – on Absoluteradio.co.uk and we'll play the interview on The Sunday Night Music Club on 15 May at 10pm on Absolute Radio. Ever wonder what they do to prepare themselves for a two-hour onslaught to 20,000 people each night? Chris only does a full-on, high-intensity work-out for an hour to focus his mind. Of course he does.

■ *Listen to The Sunday Night Music Club from 8pm every week on Absolute Radio.*

FURTHER LISTENING...

MARTIN FRY'S ABC OF THE 80s

Absolute 80s, 2 May, 9-10pm

As ABC prepare to release *The Lexicon Of Love 2* album, main-man Martin Fry launches a weekly programme looking at an A to Z of iconic songs from the '80s.

BREK-FEST WITH OCEAN COLOUR SCENE

Absolute Radio, 6 May, 6-10am

The Christian O'Connell Breakfast Show rocks up in the back garden of a lucky listener's house in Holt Heath, Worcestershire, to host Brek-Fest headlined by Ocean Colour Scene.

ALAN MCGEE & JOHN POWER

Absolute Radio 90s, 8 May, 10am-1pm

The former Creation Records boss and the Cast/La's man talk to Andy Bush about the Musicians Against Homelessness gigs in September.

TRAVIS AT THE HARD ROCK CAFE

Absolute Radio, 19 May, 9-10pm

Highlights of Travis recorded live for Absolute Radio at the

Hard Rock Cafe in London, playing new songs and all the classics.

RICHARD ASHCROFT ON ABSOLUTE RADIO

Absolute Radio, 21 May, 10-11pm

First of two takeover specials hosted by Richard Ashcroft, in town to promote new album *These People*.



Takeover bid:
Richard Ashcroft.

WEEZER

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW COTTERILL

Stream Of Un



Up, up and away:
Weezer (from left, Brian
Bell, Rivers Cuomo,
Scott Shriner, Patrick
Wilson), on the roof
of Brixton Academy,
London, 5 April, 2016.

consciousness



Rivers Cuomo and his grunge-pop veterans Weezer have made their best LP in years. This should be cause for celebration, but **Simon Goddard** discovers a frontman so withdrawn he's virtually unresponsive. What did we expect from the man who turned his house into an isolation chamber?

Eight hours before playing to a packed Brixton Academy, Weezer's frontman Rivers Cuomo tweets a polite warning to their fans. "Feel free to say hi, but know that I'm socially awkward as heck so I may not say many words." Sure enough, come the show itself – the Californian nerd-rockers' second of two sold-out UK dates promoting the return-to-'90s-peak-form of their new self-titled "White Album" – Cuomo says little to his moshing admirers beyond the parting promise "see you at Reading and Glastonbury!" And even that turns out to be bollocks. "Um. We're not playing them, no," he tells Q the next day when we convene in a West London studio. "I made that up."

"Socially awkward" doesn't even begin to describe Cuomo, as rum a 24-carat spook as US indie rock has ever puncted across the Atlantic, in the hour Q spends in his company. Meeting him in 2005, a "freaked out" Liam Gallagher likened Cuomo to Yoda. But even Yoda looked people in the eye, a feat evidently beyond the Weezer geezer's disconcertingly detached behaviour. For our entire conversation his gaze never leaves the cup in his hand from a thermos flask of Earl Grey tea, speaking in a flat, emotionless drone between pauses so agonising it's as if all time has >>

stopped and we're in some bizarre dream sequence from *Twin Peaks* missing only a backwards-talking dwarf. The whole experience is akin to a school counsellor talking to a bullied child handicapped by debilitating oversensitivity. Which, as Cuomo eventually manages to explain, is precisely his story.

The eldest son of hippy parents (he has a younger brother called Leaves), Cuomo spent his '70s childhood living on a Hindu ashram in Connecticut. "Vegetarianism, yoga, orange robes, beards, sometimes shaven heads, chanting, incense," he lists, abstractedly. At the age of 11, Cuomo's mother moved him to a New England public school where he tried to blend in by calling himself "Peter". When the bullies found out the truth, aggravated by Cuomo's naively honest supplementary ammo that he also answered to Rama "because that's the name our guru gave me", for self-defence he took karate lessons. "Which didn't last long," he adds in measured monotone. "There was pain involved."

Turning 16, he hit an existential crossroads, the only time in his life Cuomo believes he's ever been "depressed", turning to his family's current "Zen master", a Buddhist monk, for advice. "I told him I didn't understand the point of pursuing anything practical in my life because everything was ephemeral and we're just going to die, so I'd rather become a monk.

And he said, 'Yes, that's all correct, but the monk's life is just as meaningless. So just pick something that you enjoy.' I thought about it for just a second. Then realised I wanted to be a rock star."

Moving to Los Angeles, Cuomo gradually formed Weezer (his asthmatic childhood nickname), signing with David Geffen for the band's eponymous 1994 debut, aka *The Blue Album*, which forever defined their geek grunge brand; by today's shorthand, *The Big Bang Theory*-plays-Nirvana. Thanks in no small part to the success of goofy hit single *Buddy Holly* and Spike Jonze's accompanying *Happy Days* video, Cuomo found himself "playing to 10 year olds", cruelly denied the rock'n'roll sexual fantasies of his heavy metal-loving youth. "We'd end up after a show on the tourbus practising French language verb conjugations," he says, all too believably. "Lonely and disillusioned", Cuomo put Weezer on ice in 1995, spending his royalties on a radical new operation to correct a congenital shortage in his left leg (until then he'd worn a lifted shoe), before enrolling at Harvard University where he grew a beard and tapped around campus with a cane in deliberate anonymity. That freshman year, he fell in unrequited love with a lesbian, subject of *Pink Triangle*, one of many painfully frank songs about his sex life that would form Weezer's 1996 return, *Pinkerton*. Though now reappraised as a generational

"I wanted to be in Mötley Crüe. I was trying to be more honest and sing about my basest desires." Rivers Cuomo

"emo masterpiece", back then it was a critically mauled commercial flop. "We could have had this gigantic record which this new young audience wanted to hear," mourns Cuomo. "And instead I brought it down to my personal gutter. So I was very

embarrassed. I felt guilty that I'd taken the band in this self-serving direction. It's because our first album presented an untruthful version of myself as the clean-cut boy next door whereas, in fact, I wanted to be in Mötley Crüe. I was trying to be more honest and sing about my basest desires."

So Cuomo retreated again, from music, from daylight, from humanity: this time bunkering in his LA apartment beside a highway overpass where he painted the walls black, insulating the windows with fibreglass, spending every

Eat your heart out, Slash: Rivers Cuomo unleashes a solo at Brixton.



All white on the night: Weezer, live at Brixton Academy, 5 April, 2016.



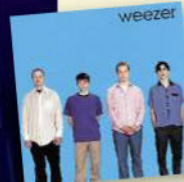
Smells Like Geek Spirit

Q's Essential Weezer Top 10 Playlist

1. Undone – The Sweater Song

(THE BLUE ALBUM, 1994)

Their debut '90s slacker anthem. Three parts Kurt Cobain to one part Sesame Street.



2. Buddy Holly

(THE BLUE ALBUM, 1994)

The monster hit with the classic video. Impossible to hear and not see Fonzie dancing.

3. Tired Of Sex

(PINKERTON, 1996)

Overture of Cuomo's "personal gutter" LP: thrashing grunge-pop catchier than the clap.

4. Pink Triangle

(PINKERTON, 1996)

Tragicomic, true and tuneful account of Cuomo's doomed Harvard lesbian crush.

5. Hash Pipe

(THE GREEN ALBUM, 2001)

Chugging metal salute to a transvestite hooker. Censored as "Half Pipe" by the BBC.

6. Beverly Hills

(MAKE BELIEVE, 2005)

Their only UK Top 10 hit, an unapologetic dumbass glorification of the A-list life.

7. Pork And Beans

(THE RED ALBUM, 2008)

Told by their label to be "more commercial", Cuomo's angry (if commercial) response.



8. Back To The Shack

(EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT IN THE END, 2014)

Swaggering rock promise to their old, exasperated fans to return to their '90s roots.

9. Thank God For Girls

(THE WHITE ALBUM, 2016)

They bake! They sweat! They care! Weezer's satirical modern "feminist" anthem.

10. King Of The World


(THE WHITE ALBUM, 2016)

Cuomo's love song to his hypersensitive Japanese wife. She blames Hiroshima.

day in noise-blocking headphones reading the complete works of Nietzsche. "That was my most extreme period, psychologically," he understates. Amid this vampiric isolation, Cuomo also began collating his infamous "Encyclopaedia Of Pop", an epic series of ring binders containing spreadsheets breaking down the works of Nirvana, Oasis and radio hits of the day into their component musical parts. Today, the files are out of reach in secure storage because Cuomo has since decided they're practically redundant. "I'm worried that the whole thing may have been a waste of time," he says with the faint tease of a laugh that never quite forms.

Somehow escaping that black hole, he again resurrected Weezer, first as a live Nirvana-only covers band listing themselves "Goat Punishment" before the proper rebirth of 2001's *The Green Album*. It marked the multi-platinum beginnings of a second wind that's sustained to the present day through seven more albums, changing line-ups, one death (ex-bassist Mikey Welsh of a drug overdose in 2011) and even the failed attempt by one aggrieved "ex-fan" to launch an appeal to crowdfund \$10 million as a pay-off to make Weezer break-up. (Drummer Patrick Wilson's response: "Make it 20 [million] and we'll do the deluxe break-up.") In between, Cuomo

returned to Harvard, choosing to share some of his course essays on MySpace, among them "A Mad And Furious Master", a non-fiction assignment detailing his sexual history of groupies, massage parlours, internet dating, vows of celibacy and how not to break them even when the woman of your dreams is wildly masturbating on your bed. "It's all factual," he admits, swishing the dregs at the bottom of the tea cup still holding his attention. And another tumbleweed-beckoning silence howls.

Thankfully, if not miraculously, Cuomo is now happily married with two kids. Though it shouldn't come as too big a surprise that his Japanese wife, Kyoto, is similarly paper-skinned: so fragile she can't even walk down the magazine aisle of the local drugstore lest her eyes catch a negative tabloid headline (as her loving husband describes on *The White Album's* *King Of The World*). Perhaps even more mercifully, at the age of 45 Cuomo has finally learned to stop worrying and *enjoy* being in Weezer. "Outside of my family and my meditation practice, Weezer is my life," he says, almost but not quite making eye contact. "Most of the unpleasant aspects have long diminished or disappeared altogether." Should they ever return, there's always the monastery. 

CASH FOR QUESTIONS

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ELECTRO-POPPERS **Years & Years** ON MACCA'S TIPS, TOILET ARCHITECTURE AND DAME JUDI DENCH'S "ARSE" BISCUITS.

WORDS PAUL STOKES PHOTOGRAPHS TOM BARNES

The cinematic reboot might be commonplace these days, but Years & Years are going for a "reheel". The trio – singer Olly Alexander, guitarist Emre Türkmen and bassist Mikey Goldsworthy – are re-enacting Stars Wars: A New Hope for Q and, surveying his Princess Leia costume,

Alexander is suddenly concerned he's brought the wrong shoes.

"I've got a lovely pair of white stilettos that would go so well with this, but they're at home," he giggles. "Still, you're probably not allowed to wear heels on an Imperial Star Destroyer, it would mark the floors!"

In fact, the same rules apply for our makeshift spaceship/photo-studio: a squash court at Swindon's Oasis Leisure Centre borrowed ahead of the band's gig there tonight. It's the latest, sold-out stop on the band's biggest tour to date.

The trio who formed in 2010 when the Radiohead-loving pals Türkmen and Goldsworthy recruited actor Alexander – he had a supporting role in Channel 4 drama *Skins* – as a singer after Goldsworthy heard him warbling in the shower. Their debut album, *Communion*, proved a brain-engaging mix of complex relationships and inescapable pop tunes, including chart-topper *King*.

However, today is about the



The annual general meeting: (above) Years & Years, Ibiza, 2015; (below) Labour leader and Olly Alexander crush Jeremy Corbyn.

Empire rather than royalty. Our Han Solo (Türkmen), Luke Skywalker (Goldsworthy) and "Sexy Leia" (not our words but, as Alexander points out, the words printed on the label inside his hair-bun wig) now face a thorough imperial interrogation – no Jedi mind tricks allowed...

Olly, you said in an interview you fancy Jeremy Corbyn: is it the power or the looks?

Phil Kirby, Norwich

Olly Alexander: Yeah! It's both. I'm a sucker for anyone with a beard and also someone who is going to smash the patriarchy!

Mikey, who was the best tipper when you waited at the [high-end restaurant] River Café in London?

Violet Jones, Cardiff

Mike Goldsworthy: Bono was really good. I can't say how much, but he was very generous. Paul McCartney

was not the best tipper but it meant more. He's old school, so he came up and gave it to you personally. Chris Martin tipped in concert tickets. Did I want to go? Well, I went reluctantly all the way to Wembley [laughs].

OA: Did Victoria Beckham tip?

MG: She was with David and Gordon Ramsay and I think Gordon paid. They were going to start a restaurant but it fell through.

OA: You have the best goss!

What's your favourite year and why?

Ellie Simpkin, via Q Mail

MG: We actually discussed this the other day and it's 1997.

Emre Türkmen: Yep 1997. OK Computer came out, Supergrass's second album – their best – too. Blur by Blur was also released.

MG: MMMBop by Hanson was Number 1!

OA: But Destiny's Child's *The Writing's On The Wall* came out in 1999. I'll go with 1997 for you guys, but it's 1999.

Olly, as an eloquent, openly gay pop star, can it be a burden to be seen as a spokesman? Do you wish there was someone like you topping the charts when you were a kid?

Tom Foley, Billericay

OA: I do think it would have made a difference when I was younger if there had been someone who was able to speak openly, confidently and unapologetically about their sexuality. Even just having a pop star who isn't >>



The force is strong: Years & Years (from left, Mikey Goldsworthy, Olly Alexander and Emre Türkmen), 6 April, 2016.

"I HAD TO STOP READING OUR FAN FICTION BECAUSE IT GOT QUITE DISTURBING. IT WAS ME AND MIKEY 'DISCOVERING' EACH OTHER..." **EMRE TÜRKMEN**

CASH FOR QUESTIONS



Upper-class act: Olly Alexander (far left) stars in *The Riot Club*, 2014.

that macho is quite important too. Our ideas of masculinity underpin a lot of institutionalised homophobia and are unhelpful. I don't think being able to speak is a burden for me. I'm very privileged to have a platform, I just can't represent a whole, diverse community. I have to do the best from my experience and hopefully that helps other people.

Olly starred in the film *The Riot Club* about badly behaved posh types. What do you think about the grip on power Old Etonians currently have?

Sarah Martin, via Q Mail

OA: I hate them! They should fuck off [all laugh]. No, that's mean. I do think the establishment in the UK is pretty horrendous though and they need knocking off their perch a bit.

If you were a Disney princess which one would you be?

@YearsNYearsPT, via Twitter

ET: I'll go with Jasmine from *Aladdin* because she's hot, exotic and lives in a nice palace. Plus, she wears MC Hammer pants, which are great.

MG: I might go with Belle from *Beauty And The Beast* because I thought The Beast was quite hot!

OA: He is! I'm so sad that I didn't get to say that first. They've taken the best ones! [Ponders for a while] I'll be Mulan because then I get to hang out with the hot army. Actually, just say I sulked because

I couldn't handle not being Jasmine or Belle [laughs].

ET: It's the end for Years & Years!

If you were a king, what would be on your coat of arms?

George James, Hull

ET: I'm a big fan of an otter. They hold hands when they sleep, so I'll have one of those.

MG: I'd have a platypus from home [Goldsworthy is originally from Melbourne].

OA: How about a phoenix?

MG: So it's a phoenix flying on top, with an otter and platypus swimming below with a shield in the middle.

OA: With a [Legend Of Zelda, gold triangle crest] Triforce on it!

MG: Yes! That's actually amazing!

OA: Can I see it mocked up, please?

Have you ever read any Years & Years fan fiction?

Harriet Aarons, via Q Mail

ET: Oh God... I read half before I had to stop because it was quite disturbing. What was the plot? Me and Mikey "discovering" each other...

OA: Ah, that's so sweet! The ones I've seen are not graphically sexual, they're actually quite chaste. There's a lot of kissing each other through tears. It's all very loving. We all live in a house together, then one night... [laughs]

Olly, you've acted alongside Judi Dench and Ben Whishaw, did you try to slip either of them any Y&Ys demos?

Gregory Wright, via Q Mail

OA: Ben is in our video for Real and he always comes to our shows. I tried to get Judi in a video but we couldn't make it work, but she says she's always hearing us on the radio. She's awesome and she's really naughty too. Once she brought all these biscuits to rehearsal that had "cock" and "arse" written on them! She's amazing!

As you like *Communion*, when was the last time you spoke to a priest?

Chris Johnston, Scunthorpe

MG: My grandfather was a minister in

"But I wanted to be Yoda!" The Rebel Alliance's "Han", "Sexy Leia" and "Luke" take your hard-hitting queries.



"I can plan a toilet better than anyone!" (below) Emre Türkmén's design classic; (below left) Mulan, Olly's favourite Disney princess. (Well, third favourite, really.)

a church. He died 10 years ago, so then. My family are super-religious, my grandma still plays church organ.

OA: Part of my family is too. But I called the album *Communion* because all the lyrics had biblical undertones to me. An occult, spiritual imagery found its way into the songs. All the songs are about sex and relationships, so I wanted a word that encapsulated something spiritual but also physical and I felt *Communion* was perfect.

Emre, your Twitter bio still says you're an architect, what was the last building you designed and has it been built yet?

James Newbery, Burgess Hill

ET: I worked on Brighton And Hove Albion's football stadium and I've seen Brighton on telly, so it has been built! I did everything on that – I drew every urinal position.

MG: He talks a lot about the toilet doors, how they swing in.

ET: I can plan a toilet better than anyone you know [laughs]. It's an art! Currently, I'm helping our security guy with his home extension. Fact.

What's the worst haircut you've ever had?

Claire Oden, Chichester

ET: When I first came to England [Türkmén grew up in Turkey] I had long hair parted down the centre.





OA: I had that too: the Aaron Carter! Curtains! I had a big Afro at one point too and then I tried to dye it red and it went ginger... there's been a few. It's part of growing up.

MG: I love Nine Inch Nails, so I went through a phase where I dyed my hair black and blue.

ET: They asked for the worst, not best!

Did anyone go home un-snogged from Desire's heavy-petting-friendly video shoot?

Janet Mason, Exeter

OA: Those two didn't get much action.

ET: I saw an astounding pair of boobs, but no snogging for Mikey or me.

OA: I snogged loads of people! I snogged my best mate Cara, which was weird. And I snogged a load of guys I'd not met before too, which was... a normal Friday night!

Olly, is there one acting role you'd give up singing for?

Alex Smithies, via Q Mail

OA: I used to say Mean Girls 2 but then they made it.

MG: How about in the '90s if Tim Burton came up to you?

OA: Yeah '90s Tim Burton. I'd love to be in The Hunger Games or a Star Trek movie too, but the Jean-Luc Picard era. Or a David Lynch movie. Basically, anything sci-fi or Mean Girls-based.

ET: He really doesn't want to be in the band!

Would you start with Wayne Rooney or not this summer?

Brian Manning, via Q Mail

ET: No!

OA: I don't know what that means... Oh, football? Got it!

MG: Daniel Sturridge!

ET: I wouldn't start with Sturridge. I think I'd go with Jamie Vardy and Harry Kane.

MG: I'd go with Sturridge and Kane.

ET: No Vardy?

MG: I like Sturridge, he's good when he's fit.

ET: But he's rarely fit... *[They continue debating while Alexander looks on]*

"She's really naughty!": (right) Olly with former colleague, the rude biscuit-lovin' thesp Judi Dench; (below) Beyoncé – not a big one for walking and reading an' that, apparently.

If you were me and you had the chance to put questions to your favourite artists, what questions would you be asking?

@yearsascartoons, via Twitter

OA: I'd ask Jeff Buckley if he meant to die. Was it an accident or suicide?

ET: I'd probably ask Billy Corgan for amp settings. I've tried a bunch...


MG: I'd ask Beyoncé what she does for leisure. I just can't imagine her reading or going on the computer. I can't even imagine her walking.

Mikey and Emre, do you ever get sick of Olly getting all the attention?

Sally Kingston, Fife

ET: Yes! *[All laugh]*

MG: I like it. Sometimes we send him out when we go to the bus after a gig.

ET: Yeah, like sending a turkey off into a landmine field. As soon as we hear the explosion we run to the bus! 

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"WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT OLD ETONIANS IN POWER? I HATE THEM. THEY SHOULD FK OFF!" OLLY ALEXANDER**



THE INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES OF

CAPTAIN ROCK

PHOTOGRAPHS

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CONTINUE!

HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THE MAELSTROM OF MID-'90S
MADNESS THAT WAS THE VERVE AND LIVE TO TELL THE
TALE? ANDREW PERRY JOINS RICHARD ASHCROFT
DOWN BY WHERE THE THAMES DOES FLOW TO HEAR
THE GORY, GLORIOUS DETAILS...



"The excitement of being back in this tsunami of shit is amazing, because my juice, my elixir, is something they ain't got! I have to do press-ups to keep up with the feeling."

Richard Ashcroft,
Putney, London,
8 April, 2016.

PART
1

WIGAN BEGINNINGS 1971-1993

Richard Ashcroft arrives from the wilderness for today's Q summit, bristling beneath a new crop, one notch longer than a suedehead. Right off the bat, he snaps that he won't be removing his shades – enviable Ray-Bans, admittedly, with blue-gold mirrored lenses – and that our photoshoot will last for exactly three minutes.

At the suggestion of a coffee, he perks up. “Not Starbucks, I hope,” he warns. Despising their “caring capitalism”, and the way baristas are required to ask for your first name when you order your latte, he apparently always tells them he's called Judas.

“It's a great name,” he chirps, as we settle at a riverside table, a stone's throw from Putney Bridge. “For a society built on a religion of forgiveness, it's amazing how we still use it for pariahs. People still chant it if a player signs for the wrong club.”

Ashcroft himself is renowned as “difficult”. He's the man

Richard Ashcroft, aka “cancer of the class”™ (top left) – Upholland School, Wigan, 1988.



who reputedly caused The Verve – one of Britain's biggest bands in the '90s – to split up on three separate occasions. He himself has noted that Cast No Shadow, the beautiful peak-period Oasis song, written about him by his friend, Noel Gallagher, “means I'm like Dracula”.

When he first surfaced with his gang of Wigan hopefuls in early '92, he talked of his conviction that he could fly, and was quickly branded “Mad Richard”. His sanity has subsequently been questioned more with regard to his imperial behaviour as a rock star.

During the six years since he was last among us, however, it's said that he properly lost the plot, succumbing to the paranoid-depressive tendencies detectable even in sky-scraping anthems like Bittersweet Symphony and Lucky Man.

From the very beginning, Ashcroft always revelled in outsider status. His battlelines-drawn mentality dates right back to his school days in Billinge, a village suburb of Wigan.

“My maths teacher called me ‘the cancer of the class’,” he recalls, with a satisfied grin. “I thought at the time, ‘I'm gonna have that as an album title one day, don't no one nick it.’ I had an attitude to authority from a very early age, even before my father passed. But I think, after that, it became even worse. Without a proper father figure, it becomes very difficult to guide a young man as much.”





"I was always a rock'n'roll star": (right) Verve (from left) Nick McCabe, Peter Salisbury, Ashcroft and Simon Jones, March, 1991; (below right) Wigan's "Battle of the Bands", featuring Verve vs The Tansads, from The Wigan Observer, February 1991.



You know, if I'd've had Gary Neville's dad – definitely! I'm better than Gary Neville, know what I mean?"

Ashcroft was life-changingly jolted onto a musical path in early '89, when he attended a Stone Roses show in Warrington. There, he witnessed a band who looked and dressed like him, planting the idea that it really could be him up there. "And the interviews excited us," he adds, "saying stuff like, 'We're not supporting the fuckin' Stones!' It was like, 'Brilliant, we're not cap-in-hand any more'. You know, 'Don't be above your station, lad!' Bollocks to that!"

He'd already been knocking around with a couple of lads at Upholland High who were interested in forming a band, Simon Jones and Pete Salisbury. They became bassist and drummer in Verve (at this point, minus the definite article), and once they'd all moved on to Winstanley College, they hooked up there with guitarist Nick

McCabe, and started woodshedding at Wigan's Splash studios, in lengthy exploratory jams. When the freshly minted quartet were due to play one of their early hometown gigs in 1991, Ashcroft sounded off in local paper *The Wigan Reporter*.

"I said, 'We're gonna blow the main band right off the stage!'" he laughs, unapologetically. "The lead guy from the band, The Tansads, was ringing me, asking me why I was being so confrontational. I just understood hype – my first ever interview, and I already caused some friction!"

By late summer '91, the wider British musical landscape was changing, very much for the better for any aspiring indie-rock group: The Stone Roses' success had opened the door for Ride

and even My Bloody Valentine were denting the charts, and then Nirvana's *Nevermind* landed.

In that climate, Verve were hastily signed to Hut, a subsidiary of mighty Virgin. The music press pitted them against fellow newcomers Suede, in a time-honoured binary rivalry – Suede's succinct South-East glam-pop, versus Verve's sprawling, Northern space-rock. Their early EPs, however, became progressively less commercial, »

"My template was Brian Wilson, Phil Spector, Stax – these amazing populist creators, who gave us depth as well. It's not about playing some indie shit in a small club."

An unemployed builder, Ashcroft's father died when he was 11, leaving the young upstart and his two younger sisters to be brought up by his mother, a hairdresser. As an early teen, he was "banned" from taking music at Upholland High School, after setting about a glockenspiel while the teacher's back was turned. Instead, he focused on football, attending Manchester's Bobby Charlton Soccer School, a few years before David Beckham.

"I might've gone pro, with more confidence," he reckons. "I played for Wigan Junior Latics for a period, but essentially, I didn't have the Venus Williams's dad situation. You do need that intensity of back-up.



"We sounded enormous":
(above) Verve in July 1993, the
year of their debut album *A Storm
In Heaven* (top right); Richard
"Liberace" Ashcroft and Peter
Salisbury (below) in Sawmills
Studios, Cornwall, 1992.



foregrounding their sense of groove and atmosphere, not to mention their refusal to self-edit. In the short term, Suede definitely minced off as victors.

"But we sounded enormous," he counters. "Nick McCabe's guitar was absolutely huge, which was great, because we gave that sense of, 'Wow, they're only 20-something, and they're that massive!'"

Behind the scenes, though, Verve were far from a unified team, even going into the recording of 1993's debut album, *A Storm In Heaven*, in Cornwall. McCabe, a fragile but creatively urgent soul, and Ashcroft were at loggerheads, locked in a battle for internal supremacy.

"When we were making one of the singles," Ashcroft bitterly recalls, "one member of the band [i.e. McCabe] said I was singing in a too emotional way. That one comment affected everything up to and including the first album – a lack of confidence, having it dented. Even though I'd got the bravado, I was only 21. Looking back, I didn't realise how vulnerable I was."

Heavy on squalling guitar effects, light on "big tunes", *A Storm In Heaven* was evocatively hailed in one review as "a gigantic, rudderless air balloon of kaleidoscopic beauty". In plainer language: not a hit.

The band, Ashcroft reveals, were already calling him Liberace. "I used to wear sparkly mad T-shirts," he explains.

Was it also about tantrums, and delusions of grandeur? "Well, I'm a bit sparkly," he replies.

PART
2

NORTHERN SOUL & BITTERSWEET TRIUMPH 1994-1999

The definite article years: The Verve on the Lollapalooza tour, Kansas, 11 July, 1994; (below) their second album *A Northern Soul*, from 1995.

The tide of British alt-rock would soon shift to Verve's advantage once again, and the first indicator came when, touring *A Storm In Heaven* in December '93, they were joined by a support act made up of Lancastrian herberts, just like them, called Oasis.

"A big chunk of my personality should've been in their band," Ashcroft ponders today. "I could've swapped places with either Noel or

Liam and nobody would've really known, as in: attitude, interviews, what we felt about melody."

Immediately bonding with the garrulous Gallaghers, Ashcroft began to visualise an unforeseen path for Verve. "We'd been through a few years of people being the anti-showman – shoegaze-y shit. Even I suffered from that on *A Storm In Heaven*, but Oasis were the wake-up I needed. Suddenly I came back to the guy I really was."

In terms of his sparring with McCabe, the manifest destiny of Oasis gave Ashcroft the clout to say, "See, I told you so", and assert his less airy-fairy vision.

"At that time, I was starting to write my first proper tunes – stuff like *On Your Own*, which ended up on [second album] *A Northern Soul*. I remember playing Noel a bit of *History* while they were recording *Definitely Maybe* in Wales [in April '94].

"Every generation keeps getting told that everything's already been done, and there's no more great songs out there, so when Noel came along with *Live Forever*, that one song changed everything. Because now it was like, 'No, fuck you, we're gonna start writing some anthems, some classics. It's our turn.'"

That summer, as Oasismania erupted, no one was more "mad for



it" than Richard Ashcroft, newly nicknamed Captain Rock by Noel. Trawling around America for two months on the Lollapalooza, one night he wound up on a drip in hospital, suffering from dehydration after an E bender, his body fluid seven pints shy of normal levels. It didn't help

that he'd been dumped by his girlfriend of six years' standing.

The hi-jinx rolled on into the residential sessions for *A Northern Soul* in Wales. Ashcroft went AWOL for days at a time; producer Owen Morris, fresh from knocking Oasis's *Definitely Maybe* into shape, famously hurled a chair through a window in joy when Ashcroft first played him *History*, a remarkable narrative song he'd penned about a man's broken dreams in the big city, on acoustic guitar. Although its birth was traumatic for all parties, it was to be the one album when Verve's turbulent chemistry was perfectly balanced, reflecting each of the conflicting parties' aesthetic.

The brittle equilibrium wouldn't hold for long, but a buoyant mood surrounded the release of *A Northern Soul*, newly credited to The Verve, after a legal tangle with US jazz label Verve.

>>

**MAD
RICHARD'S
MASTERPIECES
ASHCROFT'S
20 TOP
TRUMPS**

1 A MAN CALLED SUN

(B-side of *All In The Mind*, 1992)

Smouldering psychedelic groove from Verve's debut. They'd re-recorded the A-side after crying at its inadequacy while on LSD.

2 GRAVITY GRAVE

(Single, 1992)

The pick of Verve's two eight-minute jam waxings. Like a funkier Pink Floyd, it got little in the way of airplay.



3 SOUTH PACIFIC

(*Voyager 1 EP*, 1993)

Obscure shoegaze highlight of early-Verve's '93 roadshow, from a US-only live release. Ashcroft daydreams of retiring to warmer climes.

4 SLIDE AWAY

(*A Storm In Heaven*, 1993)

Their cupboard bare of songs, post-EPs, Verve's first album was hastily written, but this fluctuating gem stood out. A year later, Oasis recycled the title.

On tour that summer, they were a band on the edge, even while Ashcroft was on a high, after secretly marrying Kate Radley, erstwhile Spiritualized keyboard player and subject of a couple of Jason Pierce's most heartbroken ballads. In September '95, they were due to release *History* as a single. It should've been their crowning moment. Just days before D-Day, Ashcroft split the band for the first time.

"With other particular members," he says, still through gritted teeth, "there was a fear of populism, a fear of the commercial. They didn't realise you can have both. My template was Brian Wilson, Phil Spector, Stax – these amazing populist creators, who gave us depth as well. It's not about playing some indie shit in a small club, and thinking, 'We're the best band in the world, it's just they don't get it'. No, it's just that you haven't got a single fucking melody that anyone could give a fuck about. If you wanna be an electronic atmospheric thing, go for it! You do that, fantastic, everything's valid."

The precise identity of the "other particular members" – actually, just one member – became clear just two weeks after the split, when Ashcroft repaired to a studio in Bath, with Salisbury, Jones and school friend Simon Tong on guitar, leaving McCabe (for it was he!) to crawl off back up North and make techno back home in his bedroom.

Already, Ashcroft had songs up his sleeve for a third album, which, he says, "was 95 per cent recorded under the idea that it was my solo album, where I gained control of the environment, and I could truly do things properly." That album was *Urban Hymns*, which went through a long and painful gestation, before Ashcroft called up McCabe in the final stages, circa Christmas '96, reportedly saying that if the guitarist didn't rejoin, he (Ashcroft) would quit music forever.

What he probably didn't mention was that he'd already asked John Squire from The Stone Roses, who declined, and Suede's Bernard Butler, who auditioned but didn't "click". McCabe, however, said yes, bolting on electrifying guitar parts, and contributing to some vibey new jam tracks.

The record was, of course, duly attributed to The Verve. In their absence, Oasis had conquered all with (What's The Story) Morning Glory?, and expectation was near-boundless for their return – especially once their comeback tune began to get airplay. Hearing it back then, Bitter Sweet Symphony was simply breathtaking. Ashcroft's voice was stage-centre, with hardly a guitar in earshot.

Fully earning their Number 2 slot in June '97, the band already knew before release that they wouldn't earn a penny from it. They'd used a sample from an orchestral version of The Rolling Stones' *The Last Time*, recorded in the mid-'60s by their then-manager Andrew Loog Oldham. Since the late-'60s, however, the Stones' publishing had been handled by Oldham's successor Allen Klein and his company, ABKCO, refused to clear the sample.

With a colossal buzz behind them, and no time to re-record, The Verve's own manager, Jazz Summers, apparently even reached Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to request their intervention, to no avail. As Summers wryly stated, ABKCO enforced "a 50-50 deal – 50 per cent Jagger, 50 per cent Richards".

Even rock stars have to wait for the Gents: Ashcroft plays it cool; (below) 1997's breakthrough album *Urban Hymns*.



5 SEE YOU IN THE NEXT ONE (HAVE A GOOD TIME)

(*A Storm In Heaven*, 1993)

Ashcroft wrote this Jason Pierce-esque LP closer on acoustic. He considers it his first "proper" song.

6 THIS IS MUSIC

(*A Northern Soul*, 1995)

Ashcroft built this explosive anthem on a riff he extracted from a 35-minute tape of McCabe and co jamming à la Funkadelic.

7 ON YOUR OWN

(*A Northern Soul*, 1995)

Ashcroft, as we know him, was born here: a soaring, delightfully embellished acoustic tune, with lyrics brooding on solitude and death.

8 HISTORY

(*A Northern Soul*, 1995)

An ineffable classic, with lyrics based on William Blake's poem, London, and an unforgettably all-or-nothing vocal.

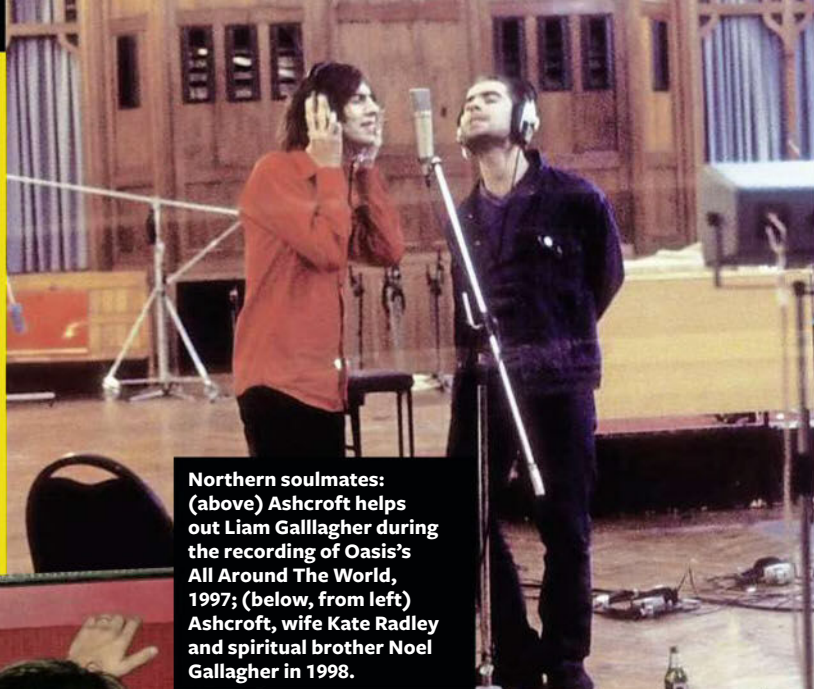
9 BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY

(*Urban Hymns*, 1997)

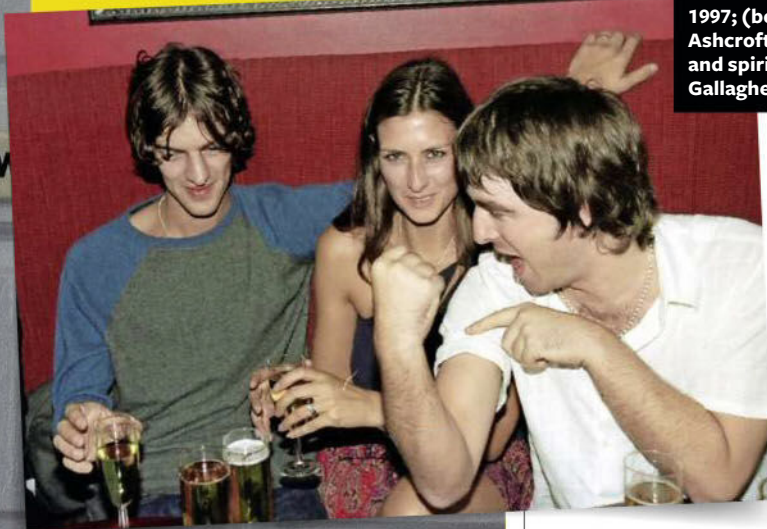
This era anthem was sample-based, but its exhilarating strings, and musings on breaking free of birth-work-death enslavement were all The Verve's.



"A big chunk of my personality should've been in Oasis. I could've swapped places with either Noel or Liam and nobody would've really known."



Northern soulmates: (above) Ashcroft helps out Liam Gallagher during the recording of Oasis's *All Around The World*, 1997; (below, from left) Ashcroft, wife Kate Radley and spiritual brother Noel Gallagher in 1998.



To this day, the settlement rankles with Ashcroft, especially when watching football coverage on ITV.

"When England play, they use Bitter Sweet, but they use this crappy little fake-ass Allen Klein version, which cuts me out of anything [*ie, performance royalties, too*]. It upsets me, because I wanna be sat there with my son, Sonny, who loves football, and feel good with each other, enjoying the moment. Instead, it's, 'Yeah, Sonny, if you listen carefully, those violins sound scratchy, they don't sound as warm as ours.'"

On the plus side, one of Ashcroft's subsequent songs, *The Drugs Don't Work*, went to Number 1 in the UK and *Lucky Man* went to Number 7. Both songs also scored big Stateside, too, making The Verve a Transatlantic success beyond their wildest dreams.

Ashcroft – described as "star time on a stick" in a Rolling Stone cover story – was not a happy star, giving off a surly attitude often bordering on outright aggression.

"The responsibility was huge for somebody that never had anything," he concedes. "Though there was merit to how we got there, you're still left with the idea there was so much luck involved, like you might as well have just put six numbers down on a lottery ticket."

He became appalled by "the parasitic Darwinian nature" of people drawn to their fame, "while the true brothers and sisters who you love don't get in touch, because they think you're too busy. And it's difficult for your immediate family, too."

"It's the classic cliché: you've not changed. I was always a rock'n'roll star, but it gets very Darwinian, and people wanna knock you down. You know, when the bird cleans the crocodile's teeth, and takes all that nasty shit away, it's a beautiful symbiotic relationship, but what happens is, the birds start pecking at your gums, and hurting you, and eating more than they should."

Ashcroft pauses, catching himself mewling about the celebrity he'd always felt born to.

"It was an immense laugh as well – seeing places, flying Concorde supersonic, enjoying life. But yeah, it was totally conflicted."

Furthermore, he didn't want an audience made up of pop kids, when he was writing more adult songs about existential pain. He felt alienated at a massive outdoor homecoming show in front of 33,000 people at Wigan's Haigh Hall – a "numbness" caused by The Verve's own phenomenon slipping from their control. Internally, relations were at breaking point. After a gig at Dublin's Slane Castle in August '98, their camp fell silent until a second split was announced the following April.

MEMBERS ONLY



10 THE DRUGS DON'T WORK

(*Urban Hymns*, 1997)

Released the day after Princess Diana's passing, Ashcroft's forlorn chart-topper also defined the mood of Britain's partied-out Chemical Generation.

11 LUCKY MAN

(*Urban Hymns*, 1997)

The one that clinched Transatlantic success, thanks to an (almost!) unequivocal positivism, building to a throng of Ashcrofts testifying "oh my my".

PART
3

FROM SOLO TO SO LOW 2000-2010



Well, this is awkward:
Ashcroft and Chris Martin
at Live8, London, 2005.

"People have this idea that I'm friends with Chris Martin, but we're not at all, by any stretch of the imagination."

In the short term, as The Verve's chief songwriter and recognisable "face", Ashcroft held all the cards. He was happily married, expecting his first child, and harvesting substantial royalty cheques for Urban Hymns. He'd also got an ongoing record deal, and a skeleton team in place to fulfil it. This included Chris Potter, who'd engineered most of Urban Hymns, and veteran orchestral arranger Wil Malone, who'd pieced together the lavish strings around that pesky sample on Bitter Sweet Symphony.

Released in 2000, the erstwhile Captain Rock's solo debut, *Alone With Everybody*, sounded mighty grown-up. Three tracks were outtakes from Urban Hymns, including Latin-tinged single *A Song For The Lovers*, which suggested Ashcroft was heading in a direction that The Verve were either not able, or not willing, to pursue.

"I was in a zone of making 'super records'," he reveals today, "where there were so many different trips in there. In 10 years' time, there'd still be details maybe you hadn't heard before, but as a whole it still hit you full-on."

Alone With Everybody was a UK chart-topper, but there was a sense that already Ashcroft's vision for a kind of "total music", of both immediacy and sophistication, jarred with many of his fans – not just the pop kids, but the lads who merely craved a rockin' good noise to bellow along to. The following album, 2002's *Human Conditions*, was panned for its Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*-style orchestral

It's yellow before blue, you bloody maniac! "Mad" Richard continues to think outside the box/baize.



12 SONNET

(*Urban Hymns*, 1997)

Another Ashcroft belter off *Urban Hymns*, with a whiff of Spandau Ballet's *True* in the verses, but a full-blooded chorus of romantic possibility.

13 LONELY SOUL

(*UNKLE's Psyence Fiction*, 1998)

This James Lavelle/DJ Shadow summit, released as The Verve were imploding, reinforced Ashcroft's future in strings and slo-mo beats.

14 A SONG FOR THE LOVERS

(*Alone With Everybody*, 2000)

A sweet cry of freedom from a rock strait-jacket, with a Latin beat, dramatic strings and multiple Ashcrofts moaning seductively.

15 C'MON PEOPLE (WE'RE MAKING IT NOW)

(*Alone With Everybody*, 2000)

From the piano house-y intro down, the song Ashcroft's happiest moment.

16 SCIENCE OF SILENCE

(*Human Conditions*, 2002)

The cosmic Lancastrian's response to fatherhood was an LP speculating on Earth's future. Here, he's "on a rock, spinning in infinity".



“Christ, that’s cold!”:
(right) Ashcroft plays his biggest ever solo gig at Old Trafford cricket ground, 2006; (left, from top) *Alone With Everybody*, 2000; *Human Conditions*, 2002; The Verve’s reunion album, *Forth*, 2008.



When his second son, Cassius, landed in 2004, he disappeared from the public gaze, making his first major appearance in months at Live8 in Hyde Park in July 2005, where he was introduced by Chris Martin as “the greatest singer in the world”, before delivering a rousing *Bitter Sweet Symphony*, backed by Coldplay. Though he later toured North America with Coldplay, circa 2006’s ship-steadying *Keys To The World* album, the association didn’t end happily.

“I don’t like my essence being stolen for any cause,” he argues. “I look back on Live8 with distaste. I’ll never forget Peter Kay coming out of the catering going, ‘Fucking hell, there’s lobster in there – they don’t have food like that in Africa!’ What the fuck did all that shit achieve, other than boosting a lot of people’s careers? Also, I thought we were doing my tune last, but Chris changed it just before we went onstage, so the performance probably had more anger in it than it should’ve.”

Chris Martin’s been very supportive, though, hasn’t he?

“Yeah, but he’s been supportive of everyone, hasn’t he? He thinks Supergrass are the best band in the world as well, so you’ve got to take the compliments with a pinch of salt. People have this idea that we’re friends, but we’re not friends at all, by any stretch of the imagination.”

A day or two after playing his biggest ever solo gig at Manchester’s Old Trafford cricket ground, things got gnarlier when Ashcroft, liberally refreshed, got arrested after wandering into a youth club in Chippenham. “To be honest, I don’t remember,” he shrugs, “but I was probably still on a high from the gig, and wanted to carry on, maybe play a tune or something. It looks a bit weird, but, well – fuck it.”

Then, in mid-2007, of all things, Ashcroft called up Nick McCabe. Barely a year before, he’d stated that “you’re more likely to see all four Beatles onstage together than The Verve”, but the band duly reunited to play some club shows, then cut a group-composed album, *Forth*. The magic simply wasn’t there.

“I wanted to make it more like the Floyd,” he says, “where we could come back when we fancied, and do something

interesting. I thought some of the older wounds might’ve been healed, and that the rest of them might’ve had a better perspective on their own roles in the band’s demise. They allowed people to feel like my ego had broken up one of the world’s biggest bands. But why would I?

“We had internal problems, beyond just clichéd arguing about general things. It’s a bit like Joy Division, innit? Like, how could you guys not have known what was going on [with Ian Curtis’s suicidal



“We had internal problems”: The Verve return (for a bit) in 2008.

splendour, and from-on-high speculations about the state of the world. Now living out in Gloucestershire, and only hitting the road sporadically, Ashcroft was seen as increasingly divorced from the reality of the people who bought his records.

“After Kate had Sonny,” he recalls, “interviewers wouldn’t stop talking about me being a dad. My theory is, people live vicariously through other people in the entertainment industry, and they weren’t ready for me to have a kid. Like, maybe you can have one when you’re 40, but right now, can’t you just be shooting up in a hotel room, performing to type? I was battling a perceived sense of who I was.”

tendency? But you're just lads, man, doing your thing, and you just want it to be good. And when it isn't, you think, 'What's up with that moody fucker? What's his problem?'"

So, what should've been a joyful (not to mention, lucrative) victory lap around Transatlantic arenas and festivals turned into a nightmarish grind, where, allegedly, Ashcroft only shared air-space with his bandmates when they were actually onstage. To him, the others "felt like they'd been stored on ice", while he now had another eight or nine years' worth of experience in the business. Ultimately, life in a group no longer agreed with him.

"Unless you're a dictator, you've got to give a sense of freedom there, but then you do that, and things start falling apart."

He couldn't be that dictator?

"It's not against my nature, but if you can't truly guide the ship and be the captain, then you've got to step back and do that bogus thing of, 'Well, everybody's got a hand on the wheel'. What happens then? You end up nowhere, going around in circles."

And so, the band blew apart again. At a low, Ashcroft, rather than returning to the comfort zone of his established solo team, went straight into an off-radar collaboration with No ID, aka Ernest Dion Wilson, the so-called "Godfather of Chicago hip-hop", who'd just scored big in 2009 with Jay Z's D.O.A. (Death Of Auto-Tune). The resultant album, 2010's *United Nations Of Sound*, recorded under the pseudonym RPA & The United Nations Of Sound, prompted perhaps the most widespread questioning of "Mad Richard"'s sanity to date. Wilson's densely compressed productions often crammed in vast string arrangements, alongside heavy-rock guitar, while Ashcroft himself variously aped Lou Reed, and blues growler John Lee Hooker. What on earth was he playing at?

While recording in the Big Apple, he says Jay Z's New York was playing everywhere. He felt on the pulse of an incredible energy. "It was like I had the future of music in the palm of my hand, but it just fell out near the end. It was soul-destroying. When I was finishing off in LA, I had pneumonia."

Once it was done, and he read the mocking reviews, "it was just a sense of, 'OK, let's not fight against it. The resistance is too strong. It feels like the tide's pushing against you, no matter what you're trying to achieve.'"

Finally, Captain Rock's batteries were flat.



(Above) Ashcroft with his RPA & The United Nations Of Sound side-project; (top) the critically mauled *United Nations Of Sound* album, 2010.

17 BREAK THE NIGHT WITH COLOUR

(*Keys To The World*, 2006)

This third-LP highlight was built around neo-classical Lennon piano chords – Dadrock in excelsis.



18 LET MY SOUL REST

(*United Nations Of Sound*, 2010)

He aptly describes this ever-ascending burst of positivity from his hip-hop folly as "three A Day In the Life's".

19 THIS IS HOW IT FEELS

(*These People*, 2016)

Hooked on a sampled panpipe (possibly), Ashcroft's comeback tune builds to a happy-sad crescendo, returns to zero, then builds even higher. Genius!

20 OUT OF MY BODY

(*These People*, 2016)

Borderline-housey newbie, flagging Ashcroft's political engagement. Whistle-blowers, he's saying, ain't getting a hero's welcome these days.

"I could be so good for you": Arthur Daley looks down on your duckin' and divin' hero, Winchester House Club, Putney; (above right) latest album, this year's *These People*.

PART
4

RELIGHTING THE FIRE 2011-2016

At high tide by Putney Bridge, and the wheels of Ashcroft's gleaming blue Mercedes jeep have disappeared under two feet of water. Quick as a flash, he nimbly vaults a garden wall, and moves his motor to dry land. In three hours, he's smoked the best part of 20 B&H, and talked Q into cowed submission. He is as mad for it as one could feasibly expect a 44-year-old Britpop-era rock god to be in 2016.

"The excitement of being back in this tsunami of shit is amazing," he says, "because my juice, my elixir, is something they ain't got. None of 'em! I'm having to do press-ups to keep up with the feeling."

His confidence about his imminent fifth solo LP, *These People*, is anything but misplaced. It reunites him with the dream team of Chris Potter and Wil Malone, also adding the electro-perspective of Mirwais Ahmadzaï, the Swiss synth wizard best known for his work with Madonna. With Noel Gallagher already thriving in a refreshed format, *These People* feels like the right album at the right time.

After *United Nations Of Sound*, its despondent creator "did nothing, for months and months". Ashcroft laughs off claims he's been on medication for depression. He returned instead to "the essence – my family, and trying to be a better dad."

He "kind of" had an album ready two years ago, but it didn't feel right. While the songs he'd been writing mined familiar themes of redemptive light amid the darkness, he felt they didn't reflect "this internal and geopolitical exploration" he'd undertaken during his sabbatical.

After much reading, he'd come to regard democracy, consumerism, corporate oppression, and the international balance of power and finance with a near-revolutionary ire.

"I'd metaphorically opened the door in *The Truman Show*, and seen the film crew," he says, "and I didn't think there was enough on the record about this stuff". So, tracks like *Out Of My Body* and *They Don't Own Me* offer personal meditations on post-millennial notions of freedom, inspired by whistleblower Edward Snowden, and events in Syria and Ukraine.

Once the album was finished, a solo acoustic appearance at Mexico City's Corona Capital festival in front of 50,000 people last November stirred that Ashcroft elixir, with the whole arena chanting back his lyrics, giving him a timely reminder of his songbook's potency.

"Anyone in the world who writes their own songs over the last 10 to 15 years," he says, throwing down the gauntlet, "let's just play one song after each other, you do yours, I'll do mine – like a *Top Trumps* of songwriting. I'm telling you: I've got *Dracula*, I've got *Chewbacca*. *King Kong* is *Bitter Sweet*. *Fu Manchu* – he's *The Drugs Don't Work*. You know what I'm saying? It's a great pack! Come on!"

Ashcroft accepts that *These People* can never match *Urban Hymns* commercially, but he's looking at the longer game. "This album's gonna be the first step for a series of records, and I'm gonna establish myself. I believe the opportunity is there to be the biggest solo artist in my country. I don't care who you are – I don't give a shit!"

Everyone from Ed Sheeran to brother Noel will be keeping an eye on the rear view. **Q**

"I'm gonna establish myself. I believe the opportunity is there to be the biggest solo artist in the country. I don't care who you are – I don't give a shit!"





TRACKS OF MY YEARS

BAT FOR LASHES

Singer-songwriter Natasha Khan on the songs that soundtracked her life – from sexy synth-punk to comedown electronica and cheesy '80s R&B.

1 SINGING AT MY NAN'S HOUSE

WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN, THE CARPENTERS (1970)

"This takes me back to childhood; I used to have to stay with my nan quite a lot. She was a bit of a scary nan [laughs]. While she was watching Blind Date downstairs smoking her Berkeley Menthols, I used to go upstairs and put on The Best Of The Carpenters. I was quite a lonely child and I liked the melodrama of [this song]. I used to sing it in front of the mirror: 'We've only just begunuuuuun' and look really sad. I love the depth and emotion in her voice; it really spoke to me. I suppose people say it's cheesy but I think it's quite poignant, especially considering what we know about Karen Carpenter's inner sadness. I just like to hear sadness and pain in my love songs [laughs]."

Sail away: The Carpenters - Natasha loved the depth and emotion of Karen Carpenter's voice.



2 MOVING TO NEW YORK

SOMEONE GREAT, LCD SOUNDSYSTEM (2007)

"It's about James Murphy's therapist dying and when you listen to the lyrics it makes a lot of sense. When I moved to New York to be with my boyfriend in the early noughties we played it every morning. We'd get up, put it on and be like, 'WOOO HOO!' It really transports me. I love dancing and I love a good story. I think storytelling is very rare in dance music – this is quite a unique track for that reason."



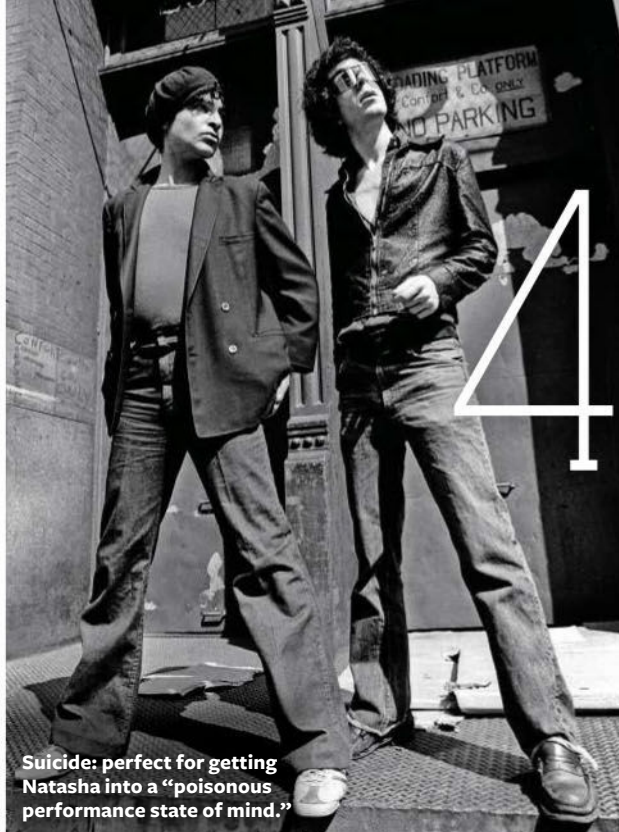
LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy: a storyteller.



3 BLOW THE COBWEBS

FIRE AND RAIN, JAMES TAYLOR (1970)

"When I was 13, my sister and I got obsessed with this River Phoenix film called *Running On Empty*. There's a scene in it where they all dance round the kitchen listening to this, and we just loved it. My godfather gave me one of his James Taylor albums on tape; he'd recorded it from the vinyl so it was all jumpy and crackly. I used to lie in bed listening to it. My most recent memory of this song was when I'd just recorded in Woodstock – we'd drive around the Catskill Mountains, singing it at the top of our lungs, with the windows down and all these glistening, sun-lit pine trees and views of the lakes. It's a really good song to blow out the cobwebs if you sing it at full pelt. It makes you feel like you're alive."



Suicide: perfect for getting Natasha into a "poisonous performance state of mind."

4 CHANNELLING MY INNER WITCH

GHOST RIDER, SUICIDE (1977)

"It's such a good song. It's the most sexy, *fuck you* song. If you really want to get into a poisonous performance state of mind, which I had to do when I did [*goth-y side-project*] Sexwitch, it definitely brings out the inner witch when I listen to it. To tackle that kind of music you have to be in a really visceral, violent mood, so it's a song I love to listen to to get into that headspace."



5 POST-CLUBBING COMEDOWNS

XTAL, APHEX TWIN (1992)

"This transports me back to being 18 and being in love with my first serious boyfriend, getting really into going out and dancing to weird electronic music. It was a time that was really innocent, but I was also discovering drugs, partying and getting fucked-up. Driving home at five in the morning just as the sun's coming up... It brings back that rushy comedown feeling, but it's also really ecstatic at the same time."



The Fatback Band: "cheesy."

6 MY MUSICAL DNA

I FOUND LOVIN', THE FATBACK BAND (1984)

"This is my happy song that gets me up. Especially on a Sunday morning. I open all the windows and blast it out while I'm making a cup of tea and frying breakfast, and I couldn't be happier. If friends or family come over we love this kind of cheesy R&B music. My mum had tons of '80s R&B compilations... Luther Vandross, Alexander O'Neal, Chaka Khan. It's part of my musical DNA."

7 DREAMING OF BEING AN ARTIST

I GO HUMBLE, BJÖRK (1995)

"I had tons of shitty jobs until I got my first publishing deal. I worked at Tesco, at a BP garage, in Next folding clothes... The most dire was working in a Christmas card-packing factory in Watford. They played Radio 1 in the warehouse, so I'd put on my headphones and listen to Björk. It's the song I used to play when I was dreaming of becoming an artist. I remember having to stretch my ears to understand some of the things she was doing; some of what she did made my ears go a bit funny. It was expanding my musical mind and I'm really thankful for that. She came to one of my first-ever gigs and came backstage afterwards and said, [*Does Björk impression*] It was ama-zing!"

■ *Bat For Lashes'* new LP, *The Bride*, is out 1 July and she headlines the *End Of The Road* festival (2-4 Sept).

Björk: "she made my ears go a bit funny," says Khan.



Their Time



Into the spotlight: Catfish And The Bottlemen's Van McCann, Cliffs Pavilion, Southend-on-Sea, 8 April, 2016.

Is Now

Van McCann of Catfish And The Bottlemen has read every move in the rock-star playbook.

And now that his band are peaking with the imminent release of their second album, they're being made good use of. Niall Doherty wades through the fans in Southend to get a closer look at the phenomenon.

PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON SARIN

Shore thing: Catfish And The Bottlemen
(from left, Johnny Bond, Benji
Blakeway, Bob Hall, Van McCann),
Southend-on-Sea, 8 April, 2016.



The kids are alright: Van McCann and the boys meet their army of fans.

Catfish And The Bottlemen are surrounded. The indie-rock quartet have taken a stroll along Southend-on-Sea esplanade and they've been besieged by fans who have ditched their place in the queue outside Cliffs Pavilion, where the band are playing tonight, to flock down to the seafront. It resembles a cross between a scene from *A Hard Day's Night* and a zombie attack in *The Walking Dead*. Every time they attempt to wriggle away, the crowd seem to double in size. "This has only started happening over the last few days," says frontman Van McCann in between pictures. The singer is bemused but enjoying the attention. He's beckoned into the throng for another photo, then to sign some autographs, then for one more selfie, and another after that, and then just one last one, and one more. He emerges from the herd only for guitarist Johnny "Bondy" Bond to be dragged in. Drummer Bob Hall and bassist Benji Blakeway nervously giggle at each other. Catfish And The Bottlemen

should be getting used to this, but they aren't.

Half an hour later, McCann is in the relative safety of the band's dressing room inside Cliffs Pavilion. The teenage hordes are back in an orderly queue outside. The four-piece are halfway through an intimate UK tour ahead of the release of their second album, *The Ride*, but fan excitement is already at fever pitch. "The first time I've ever really felt like a big band was in Halifax the other night," says McCann. "They just stood outside our dressing room singing every song." He pulls out his mobile phone and opens a video he filmed from a window of 300 people hollering away. McCann has always sensed his band would be big and looking down as the crowd serenaded him with his own songs, he realised it was happening. His mum and dad told him they struggled to get out of the traffic caused by fans chanting their son's name. McCann puts his phone back in his pocket. "It's mad that, innit? We couldn't have filled a venue with that amount of people three years ago, and now they are just stood in the street waiting for us!" He's also noticed more fans turning up at gigs bearing Catfish And The Bottlemen tattoos. Recently, a girl asked McCann to tell her the title of a song from the next album. "7!" he informed her. "She went away and got

"We don't write songs to get in the charts, we write songs to sell tickets. I think, 'Can you imagine a sea of people bouncing?'" Van McCann

a number 7 tattooed on her!" he says. "I was like, 'Fuck, what if I change the title?!' That's some dedication there."

McCann's default setting is a mix of hyperactive awe at his group's success and a steadfast belief that this was how it was always going to be. His constant buoyancy has endeared him to swarms of young fans and the band's bullish anthems has widened their appeal to blokes who were still in nappies when Oasis played Knebworth, but whose music taste seems dedicated to making up for missing out. In an era of twisting genres, there is something defiantly old school and out-of-place about Catfish And The Bottlemen. They make the sort of no-fuss indie-rock that made stars of mid-noughties bands such as Jet, The Kooks and Razorlight. It's probably no coincidence that those groups were at their commercial peak when McCann put the band together, aged 13.

Their debut, *The Balcony*, sold more than 250,000 copies and an upcoming show at Manchester's 8000-capacity Castlefield Bowl sold out in a matter of minutes. Most bands would be tempted to switch things up a little second time round, but *The Ride* only slightly hones their mix of beefed-up Strokes-style riffs and singalongs reminiscent of latter-day Oasis. It was recorded in L.A. with producer Dave Sardy, who foolishly attempted to get some synthesizers on there. McCann wasn't having it. "He was putting this mad synth on it. I was like, 'They are staying away from this album, Sardy!'" The singer says the band's aim remains simple: to make music that sounds massive outdoors. "We don't write songs to get in the charts, we write songs to sell tickets. I write songs thinking, 'Can you imagine a sea of people bouncing?'"

They won a Brit Award for Breakthrough Act in February

and McCann feels like success has been a long time coming. "We won the breakthrough award after eight years. That must be the longest breakthrough anyone has ever had," he says.

They formed in Llandudno, north Wales, where three of the four went to school (the



Step brothers: (above) refreshed after their pre-gig stroll; (below) a final rehearsal in "the activity room" backstage.



amenable Bond is from Newcastle), and McCann immediately began mapping out gigs, albums and interviews inside his own head. "Have you seen *The Commitments*, where he's in the bath and he's interviewing himself?" he says. "I'd do that in the shower and think of a lot of stuff and dream all this shit." When he walks onstage now, McCann feels like he's reliving scenes from his own imagination. Halfway through *Catfish And The Bottlemen's* performance on famed US chat show *The Late Show With David Letterman*, McCann wandered over to Bond and whispered, "look in them cameras, we look like *The Strokes*!" He's always been like this, he says. When he used to play football with his mates, he would shout "Ronaldo!" or "Cantona!" when he scored an overhead kick.

But behind McCann's "isn't everything great!" *Fast Show* character exuberance, there's a Van with a plan. He has studied his heroes closely. He'd read that *Stereophonics'* Kelly Jones used to post demos to record labels in Chinese takeaway cartons so A&Rs would look inside, so McCann did the same when he wanted a record deal. When he discovered that Noel Gallagher had already written three albums worth of material by the time Oasis were signed, he too set about creating his own catalogue. "I thought, 'If I'm gonna get signed, I need to be prepared,'" he says. When the band signed to *Communion*, the label asked them, "Have you got enough for a four-track EP?" "I've got enough for a 50-track EP," he replied. He has kept up this approach. The majority of songs >>

Southend united: feeling the love from the Cliffs Pavilion crowd.



"That line, I don't think through things. I never get time, cos I don't think things through. It's a good thing to say, isn't it? You don't get time to think, so you don't think through things, and you don't think through things because you never get time to think." Van McCann

for The Ride were completed by the time their debut was being mixed and McCann has already finished eight for the next record. "I always try and stay a year ahead, so we never get caught," he says.

Catfish And The Bottlemen are now looked after by Marcus Russell, Oasis's former manager, while producer Sardy previously worked with Oasis and Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds and the band share a press officer and a soundman with Stereophonics. As if by design, McCann has put together his dream line-up around the group. During the promotional campaign for

The Balcony, McCann did the interviews on his own but this time he's insistent on doing them with Bond sitting next to him. The singer became concerned that it looked "a bit singer-songwriterly" on his own and that people might think "there's Catfish and there's the Bottlemen". He bats away the suggestion that Q could've spoken to all of the members individually, which is what happens with every other band interview. "We're just trying to make interviews more conversational, I guess," he shrugs.

The awkward interview pairing aside, McCann is affable and chatty. A lot of the

time he beams in the way a teenager who's just been given a pass to skip the queues at Alton Towers would. With his pouty good looks, pasty complexion and slight frame, he looks a bit like a Kes version of Julian Casablancas. McCann says that growing up in Llandudno gave him stories. People there knew about your business and you knew about their business. "People know more about you than you do," he says. When he goes back, his aunties and cousins show him which Catfish And The Bottlemen clips they have been watching on YouTube and sending to their friends, and he remembers how he used to do that after going to see Arctic Monkeys, The Cribs and The Strokes. He recently watched his band's Glastonbury performance back. His mum had rung him soon after their set and told her son that he looked ill. He was – McCann and Bond had taken to the stage in the midst of a bout of food poisoning. "We had everything," says McCann. "Vomiting, leaking, tears, nose, everything. But not onstage." "And we had the only set of the weekend that got rained on," says Bond.


The singer goes through life at full pelt. There is a line on 7, the opening track on The



Up close and personal: the front row make their feelings known.

fittings at every other hotel the family stayed at and now McCann does the same thing at other people's gigs. "I just end up going, 'I wish I had that guitar amp, or I wish I had that lighting show.'"

It's hard not to get caught up in the adrenaline rush of the band's live set. It's a Friday night in Essex and the place erupts as soon as they launch into Homesick. The crowd sing every line. The band have put the lyrics to the new songs on their website and some bravely attempt to match the words to the tracks, despite the fact that they've never heard them before. McCann is a brilliant frontman, full of rock'n'roll swagger, even if he does fall into a Robbie Williams-style trap of letting the crowd sing for him once too often. Afterwards, they take it easy in their dressing room. "That was great craic!" says McCann. They opt to toast the occasion with a "Sinatra megamix" instead of a full-on party.

The only thing that worries Van McCann is the realisation that at some point he'll have to slow down and settle somewhere. At the moment, he's on tour most of the time and picks a place on the rental website Airbnb to stay for a week when he isn't. He's trying to convince Dave Sardy to put his LA pad on Airbnb so he can crash there. "I'm so unsettled when I'm not doing this life," he says, gesturing around him. "There's no buzz like going onstage and hearing songs I wrote about my mates being belted back to me. You can't find that on a Monday morning! What if I can never find a place to settle? I'll just be floating about." He disappears back into his dressing room, back to living life at 100mph. One day Van McCann will have to settle down. But that can wait. 

Ride, that sums him up best: "I don't think through things/I never get time/cos I don't think things through". It was said to McCann during a seven-hour phone conversation he had with someone (he won't say who) after the band had played a show in Las Vegas. Most of McCann's lyrics are taken from conversations, but he particularly likes that one. Although when he tries to explain the meaning, it comes out like a gruelling crossword clue. "That line, 'I don't think through things, I never get time, cos I don't think things through,' it's quite a good thing to say, isn't it? Probably because you don't get time to think, so you don't think through things, and you don't think through things because you never get time to think."

Asked to delve deeper into his lyrics, McCann often ends up either quoting them back to you or just singing them. Lots of the songs that make up The Ride sound like they're written from the point of view of someone who's struggling to catch up with themselves, but McCann says they're not that serious and that he's not "an artiste". Twice, for example, is The Ride's thumping second track and it sounds like he's railing against monotony. "The opening line says, 'I don't mind getting high in mine, shouting over music,'" says McCann. "That's about when I'd moved into a cottage with my mate Larry, and we were having a smoke... shouting over music." Similarly, the bristling stomp of Soundcheck (sample line: "I race through soundcheck/Just to meet you on your fag break") comes across like a call-to-arms anthem for escapism, but McCann says it's about "racing through

soundcheck to meet someone on their fag break". Catfish And The Bottlemen only have eyes for one thing, says McCann, and that is "playing outdoor, endless-capacity venues. There's no looking outside of that. It's very much like we've rented one bowling lane, 'Yous can have the other lanes, we're swimming in this one!'"

For now they have to settle with the 1600-capacity Cliffs Pavilion. It's an hour before showtime and the band are backstage, rattling through yet more new songs in their "activity room", a makeshift rehearsal space. McCann says it's like they have a little night out to themselves before they go onstage. He gets "dead excited" before the band go on. "I smoke a fat one, then put some tunes on," he says. "Bondy puts some big songs on. He knows the ones that get me riled up. We'll put a belting Killers tune on, then big Frank Sinatra." McCann loves playing live but is finding it increasingly hard to watch other people's gigs. His mum and dad used to run a B&B and would survey the furniture and

"There's no buzz like going onstage and hearing songs I wrote about my mates being belted back at me."



"I could murder some competitively priced poledwica sopocka...":
Gruff Rhys, Cardiff,
5 April, 2016.



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£4,50/kg



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£1.20
£1.10
£1.10
£1.10
£1.10
£1.10



CAPRIO
£1,10



WISH EU WERE HERE!

Super Furry Animals frontman **Gruff Rhys** is a prolific songwriter, musician, filmmaker and author, with plans for more soundtracks, solo releases and new SFA material all bubbling away. He's also got three small children and his hands full. But this internationalist can't bear to see Britain cut itself off from Europe, so he's released an anti-Brexit single, *I Love EU*. Touring cosmopolitan Cardiff, he explains why.



Gruff Rhys, emblem of imagination, pioneer of creative possibility, believes in the power of the vote. We're perched at the front window of a small Portuguese bakery in Cardiff – the lively Nata & Co in the

wonkily-titled, cosmopolitan Splott area (where Shirley Bassey grew up from aged two, “but that didn’t sound as good,” notes Rhys, “as Tiger Bay”) – and Wales’s premier creative polymath recalls the decades-long struggle for Welsh devolution.

For him, it was political *and* personal, something his civil servant/poet/mountaineer father had campaigned for all his life (and died two days before the Welsh Assembly was finally established in 1999).

“Cardiff narrowly voted against devolution,” he reminds us, over “lunch” of a *caffe latte* and an exquisitely glazed Portuguese custard tart. “Devolution was democratically imposed by the rest of Wales. So that was embarrassing...”

He smiles ruefully, seams of silver now meandering through the dark hair spilling out from his ever-present, buskery woollen hat.

As Britain’s EU referendum approaches this summer, Rhys is doing what he can to avoid another *narrow-against*. He is a lifelong left-wing idealist and pacifist who’s watched the debate hijacked by “the xenophobes” (UKIP, the dusty elder Tories, the fear-generating media) since the Middle Eastern migrant/refugee crisis became a daily news disaster in the summer of 2015.



Today, as a musician, songwriter, filmmaker, author, producer, Super Furry Animal and a good man refusing to do nothing, he's doing the only thing he can, contributing some art. I Love EU, the song and its joyously illustrative video, heralds the return to pop of not only politics but gentle jokes, wistful romance and irresistible charm. In its twinkly, plinky, sing-a-long simplicity it's less protest more, er, *pro-zest*. "I love EU," he sings (pronounced "you"), in a baritone croon identical to Jarvis Cocker's. "When I met you, I'd never tasted pasta or baguettes/I'd never heard the golden call of castanets... you liberated me from pie and mash...", before a scolding ensues for the "corporates of the day". Rhys is neither party political mouthpiece nor belligerent polemicist, confessing to a romantic heart today. "I believe in the fantasy of... peace and harmony," he smiles, dreamily, yet to start on his coffee after 12 contemplative minutes.

"It's emotional. I've grown up in the EU, as a travelling musician. I've got an EU passport. I want my kids to have the same... aim." Finally, he takes a lukewarm sip and considers the economic arguments, how Britain, outside the EU, "would be completely dominated by the policies of the free market, even more than ever". Economics, though, "doesn't seem to be the argument right now". It's all about immigration.

"I don't think we should be leaving the EU for xenophobic reasons in a time of humanitarian crisis," he concludes, contemplating the chaos across Europe's borders. "It's completely reckless. Cameron's timing is reckless. We need solidarity, y'know?" Rhys has no idea how to solve this crisis (and neither does anyone else), his lone suggestion today being "we've got to get mentally prepared for helping people, things will change".

His wilful comedy song, meanwhile, is merely emblematic of optimism, a label-free "temporary" tune which won't be played on most radio stations (it contravenes BBC regulations). Are politics finally returning to pop?

"I don't know," he meanders. "Maybe the issues [*in recent years*] have been so huge they had to be ignored." He takes an enormous bite, finally, of his delicious European pastry.

The above information took 34 minutes to glean from the staggeringly unhurried Gruffydd Maredudd Bowen Rhys, born in 1970, raised at the bottom of a mountain in the Welsh-speaking quarry town of Bethesda, his conversation not only vague-as-a-cloud but downright alarming: 50 per cent silence while staring out the window, 20 per cent "um... ah... oh, *look*," (at, say, a woman in a parked car not-so-fascinatingly "typing!", ie, texting on her phone) and 30 per cent translating the best English words he can from the Welsh language dominating his thoughts. If you'd never met him before you'd think he was psychologically askew.

But Q has met him, three times since 1999, so merely contemplates, while awaiting his words, both his rustic granddad's cardie with cracked leather buttons and the view currently transfixing him: a Tesco Express, a tanning shop, the African Mothers Foundation Ltd (which campaigns for girls' education) and a charity shop with three guitars in the window.

If he's even more distracted than usual, he is "very tired" after a morning looking after seven children, in the middle of a house move, with a 10-month-old new baby brother for his two young daughters. Unfeasibly, then, in recent years he's been more productive than ever, last year seeing not only the Super Furry Animals' live spectacular return after six years (psychedelic lasers, boiler-suited mad scientists, the classic Yeti costumes) but the self-written Cardiff theatre production, *The Insatiable, Inflatable Candy Lion* (an anti-consumerism parable for kids), while 2014 saw the multi-award-nominated book/album/documentary *American Interior* (his "investigative" journey through the life of 18th-century Welsh farmhand John Evans) and the soundtrack for the Dylan Thomas

biopic *Set Fire To The Stars* (which won him a Welsh BAFTA; he has "no idea" where it is). Imminently, there are more soundtracks, solo material and SFA's Euro 2016 song for Wales, the not-so-profoundly-titled *Bing Bong* which Rhys describes as "a six-and-half-minute demented disco idiot track, in the Welsh language". Turning 46 this summer, he's now a life-long working artist, an ideas man of surrealism and dissent, a quiet, poetic soul of seemingly inscrutable inner depths who chooses a life of chaos in the name of creative freedom. Or does he?

"Well, the band always works on the assumption we'll be dropped next week," he insists, happily, musing on what ultimately drives him. "I can't take anything for granted, every record could be my last. It is a

precarious existence. But joyful. And crazy." And not boring? "Definitely not boring. And sometimes... um... um..." He drifts away once more,

hypnotised by the charity shop window, finishing the last of his tart as Q stares at his head, side-on, wondering what's *going on in there*?

Twenty years since Super Furry Animals' 1996 debut *Fuzzy Logic* and we know very little, still, about Gruff Rhys, now a central maverick figure in the UK arts, a private man never keen to "dwell on myself", whose profoundly eccentric communication foibles act as a kind of emotional moat (whether conscious or not), a meandering, watery, no-man's land where so many queries, be it personal, creative, politically important or everyday, simply topple into its depths, flounder around for many minutes *and drown*.

His dad was a hugely respected figure in Welsh cultural life and a query about his influence today either goes unheard or is ignored (in 1999 he told me all he'd inherited from his parents was, criekey, "noses"). His run-down, picturesque, 90 per cent Welsh-speaking hometown was a magnet for the '70s drop-outs, the punks and the boho hippies, "singers and nutters from all over the world", a creative kid boggling at the incoming waves of strangers drawn not only to >>



Sureally saying something: (above) the Super Furies onstage, *Summer In The City*, Manchester, 2015; (left) Gruff and co wheel out the heavy artillery back in 1997.

DANISH BACON SHOP



“It’s emotional. I’ve grown up in the EU, as a travelling musician. I’ve got an EU passport. I want my kids to have the same.”



In your face, Boris!
(clockwise, from top)
Gruff Rhys hits Cardiff
for an epicurean grand
tour, pigging out,
Scandi-style; going
Portuguese in Nata & Co;
and venturing into the
former Eastern Bloc.



the beautiful *vah-leez* but the “cheap housing” (informing his socialist, one-world outlook today). By aged five he was already writing songs (pretending to be The Osmonds), by 16, inspired by his punk rock elder brother, he was fronting the strikingly named band Fuck Off Everyone.

Why that name? “Because we were 16,” quips Rhys, fairly.

He took to the alarming habit of using, onstage, an industrial Black & Decker drill. “I was drilling my mate’s guitar, drilling myself,” he recalls, casually. How can you drill yourself without ending up in hospital? “Stage craft!” he declares. “If you put a drill into an item of clothing it just winds it up and looks amazing. It also obscured the musical... incompetence.” With zero interest in reality (a “proper” job) he applied to art college, leaving North Wales for Manchester Poly. For three years he lived in a council flat in Hulme, “at the height of the gun violence and acid attacks...”

He stops, frowns, aggrieved at the negative vibes. “Manchester’s an incredible, inspiring city,” he counters. “But there was definitely a period there. I got mugged. Someone tried to abduct me. All sorts.”

Pressed for details on this intriguing abduction episode (Q rather hoping it was by aliens), he won’t elaborate.

“I don’t wanna get into it. It was... fine.”

Beyond Manchester he watched the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ousting of Margaret Thatcher, the freeing of Nelson Mandela, the Czechoslovakian revolution and the independence of the Balkan States. Simultaneously, as he noted back in 1999, there were “bands with silly trousers in the charts, a lot of positive music”. From here on, musically, he dropped “dissonance” for “melodies” and moved to Cardiff, where Super Furry Animals formed, signing to Creation Records in 1995, a culturally dynamic good fortune he found, “so absurd we had to take the piss, we were meant to be... serious heroes?”

Soon, they were the UK’s foremost titans of surrealism, famed for 40ft inflatable bears, golf buggies, lightbulb-festooned Tron outfits and their Techno Tank (bought from an arms dealer and driven around festivals). “The driving idea was,” notes Rhys of their visual tomfoolery, “on a night out, I’d rather see a Power Ranger than some bloke from North Wales.”

In 1996, their insurrectionary masterpiece *The Man Don’t Give A Fuck* became their live set-closing staple, the song which, during rehearsals in an upstairs room in Tenby’s council chambers in 1999, caused masonry to dislodge from the ceiling below, plummeting onto the downstairs boardroom table where a council meeting was being held. “We’ve survived Cromwell,” announced the chairman, “but we didn’t survive the Super Furry Animals!” “We were featured,” grins Rhys today, satisfied, “in the minutes of the council.”

G

ruff Rhys profoundly believes in subversive art, an attitude tragically lacking in rock’n’roll in recent years. He partly blames that on austerity cuts to arts funding (SFA headlined the Music Against Austerity concert in Manchester in 2015).

“It’s much harder for bands now,” he laments. “For anyone trying to make music or art, it’s... crazy juggling. A huge crisis. Getting rid of student grants was shameful, locking a whole generation out of culture.”

The urban regeneration process happening nationwide appals him. Cardiff, like everywhere else, is dominated by cranes looming over building sites, creating “luxury apartments” only the wealthy can afford. “It’s just horrific,” he puffs. “It’s going back to the 19th century, isn’t it? The super-rich dominating... the proletariat! I was born in the ’70s, a time historically when there was the least gap between rich and poor, when opportunity was available for everybody. The whole narrative of that era was changed by the Conservatives in

“I believe in the fantasy of a utopian pan-continental civilisation based on welfare not warfare.”



the 1980s, who only referred to it as a period of strikes and depression whereas it was the opposite, it was... utopia! It’s no

accident that no one is making psychedelic rock operas like they did in the ’70s. They were publicly funded!” He has, he notes, “theories” on how the world became so corporate, so *straight*, theories he won’t share today, “because they’re extremely... libellous!” He remains, though, optimistic, one reason I Love EU is so unfeasibly sunny.

“A wild optimism can be subversive in times like this,” he avers. “It’s really weird, protesting for the status quo. It goes against all... instinct. But it’s about having a long-term plan for change...”

He drifts away once again, contemplating the African Mothers Foundation across the road where their manifesto is boldly written below their name: “WE CREATE CHANGE IN FOUR WAYS. We Inspire. We Motivate. We Educate. We Campaign.” “That’s it,” beams Rhys, delighted. “That’s the four-point plan!”

F

ive days after we meet, Rhys emails wondering if he needs to “elaborate on anything”, feeling his serious political points may have been vague. They were. Within 24 hours he responds to a few questions, an erudite writer where the conversational cloud had been.

He clarifies his pro-EU position. “I believe in the fantasy of a utopian pan-continental civilisation based on welfare



He really does love EU! (clockwise, from left) Gruff samples some of that foreign muck; offers a warm Welsh welcome to any passing trading vessels; chowing down on a proper “pan-continental” ice-cream cornet.



ROCK'N'EUROLL!

Five more novelty continental “classics” not on Nigel Farage’s iPod.

Y VIVA ESPANA – Sylvia (1974)

Thundering castanet-clicker propping up the Torremolinos economy ever since. Sylvia herself was actually Swedish. Olé!

YOUNG PARISIANS –

Adam & The Ants (1978)

Before his highwayman high jinks, Adam’s vinyl debut was this Francophile curiosity, where young Parisians “talk nuffink but French”. Zut alors!

VIENNA – Ultravox (1981)

Hey, Midge, why you looka so sad? Because Joe “Shaddap You



Sylvia: the soundtrack to countless sangria blackouts.

Face” Dolce kept your pompous synth-pop yodel off Number 1. *Schweinhund!*

JE SUIS UN ROCK STAR –

Bill Wyman (1981)

Stones crumpeteer entices foxy lady to his Cote d’Azur bedroom. Yes, m’lud, he really hink I’m your dad/And you’re my daughter.” *Mon dieu!*

LA DOLCE VITA –

Ryan Paris (1983)

Ah, La Dolce Vita! As in the mighty Fellini filmic serenade to Rome. Sung by an Italian, called Paris, where he also shot the video. *Espèce d’idiot!*

not warfare,” he writes. European status, he adds, complements his Welsh republican stance.

“Nationhood and people’s personal identities are and should always be fluid. Flag-waving is a real turn-off for me. I like the (possibly fanciful) idea of a gigantic liberator that lets different cultures co-exist with no dominant force or oppressor.” He backs Jeremy Corbyn for PM (who would “scrap Trident, reverse hurtful Tory cuts”) and ponders how a one-world, free-movement-for-all ideology could work in practical reality.


“Most people just want to live in peace near their families and friends,” he concludes. “The fair distribution of global wealth and meaningful climate treaties could ensure this – but don’t ask me – I’m just a club singer!” (NB. A second attempt at a query over his beloved

dad remains unanswered, toppled over into his emotional moat).

Back in Cardiff, Rhys embarked on a guided tour pointing out sights of interest in this “new fiscal city, a melting pot, very cosmopolitan for a small city, I think the oldest mosque in the UK is here”. We stroll through the pedestrianised identikit contemporary town centre where only chains can afford to rent, through the Victorian arcades where the independent shops are now squeezed together, towards Cardiff Central station, now regenerating into an area housing a new BBC Centre, a business centre, an arts centre and those ubiquitous unaffordable flats, a £400 million project backed by financial services firm Legal & General Capital. “Even Burger King’s been run out of town,” he notes,

pointing to a ghostly fast food hoarding.

We stand in Central Square, staring at an artist’s impression printed on a construction site wall of the forthcoming new Gateway to the Capital of Wales (aiming to “reflect Cardiff’s ambition to be amongst Europe’s most successful cities”). It’s a night-time cityscape of glinting chrome and glass, of thrusting, profit-led corporate ambition, which looks, in its twinkling, skyscraping, futuristic splendour, a lot like Las Vegas.

“This is, usually, a place for the homeless to rest,” Rhys announces, pointing to the pavement below the sparkling billboard. “It’s just a picture. An illusion.” He offers up a gently clenched fist in the power-to-the-people tradition before shambling off back to his kids, and whatever the future for them (and all the rest of us) might be. 

**"BEING YOUNG
IS TORTUROUS.
GETTING OLDER
TAUGHT ME
HOW TO LIVE."**



Where you bin?:
Garbage's Shirley
Manson.

SHIRLEY MANSON

The Garbage singer's rules for living.

1

ENGINEER YOUR OWN HAPPINESS

When I was most successful I was never more miserable. I had everything I thought I wanted and it didn't make me feel good in any way. When attention and success fell away I had to engineer a lovely life, independent of external validation. Find small things that make you happy – a great cup of coffee, meditation, walking the dog, dancing – and inject them into your life. What's the secret to a great coffee? I don't know but I married a man who does [laughs]. Little things that can be prepared to be enjoyed are priceless.

2

BE AUTHENTIC

The most interesting version of you is the truthful one. It's unique – with all the flaws. You can't have a good life if you're telling lies to please others. You get trapped by the lies. As you get older you can't find the energy to lie and the real you comes spilling out [laughs].

3

BE A FEMINIST

Be one if you're a woman, and if you're a man too. Until the sexes are evenly balanced we are all operating at a disadvantage. Women won't ever enjoy equality without help from our male counterparts. They may question why they want to support that but a happy queen leads to a happy king. But a happy king without a happy queen is not a good scene.

4

DON'T BE A GOOD GIRL

There seems to be increasing pressure on women to look a certain way, act a certain way, be a certain way. I say, fuck it. Be whoever you want to be. Write your own rules. Fuck the system: it's designed to watch you fail.

5

ALWAYS SPEAK UP

Far too much is made of keeping your opinions to yourself. A healthy culture comes from debate and tolerating different opinions. I don't want to be a passive participant

in my life, I want to be an active one. I want to stand up against injustice rather than be quietly outraged from afar. I don't think that's helping anybody.

6

GO PLACES

Travel and garner different perspectives. Learning from other cultures has been a formidable force. Going to Bhutan where they prize happiness over everything else blew my brains. And seeing the poverty in India – orphaned children living on a traffic island – put everything in perspective. When I hear people moan about their lot I think, "Be grateful you're not growing up on a traffic island! Shut the fuck up [laughs]."

7

READ MORE

A love of books has brought me incredible comfort over the years. No matter how difficult life can get, you can escape into a book, into another person's story and be transported out of your reality. It's expanded my world view. It's just a love of words, language, the means by which we can all communicate and connect. Connection is

important to me. I want to be connected and not just a voyeur on the outskirts, I want to be invested in my life.

8

LIFE IS SHORT BUT STORIES ARE LONG

When I was young I compared myself to others, feeling like other people had more than I did. I came to realise stories are not set in stone. You are continually evolving. Even when things seem bleak and there's no way out, you don't know how things will end. So don't give up on yourself. Every single minute of the day you change and your circumstances change and what can seem dark in the evening can be completely different in the morning.

9

LIVE IN THE PRESENT

I used to really concern myself with the past and my own darkness. I have no floor to my darkness, I could examine it forever. As I got older, I became aware of my mortality. I might die tomorrow so let's make now as pleasant as possible. Getting older has been nothing but pleasant: I feel so much better as a human. When I was young I felt so unhappy, uncomfortable, unsafe and uncertain. I don't know why everyone harps on about how great it is to be young, 'cos it's actually torturous [laughs]. Getting older taught me how to live.

10

LISTEN TO VINYL

A few years ago a flood destroyed my entire vinyl collection. My heart was broken. Then for my birthday last year I got a turntable and reinvested in my record collection. It's brought me so much pleasure. Really listening to a record is magical. I've encouraged my friends to do the same and we have Vinyl Nights. It's life-enhancing, a meditation of sorts. 

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The Stone Roses
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"You've got to
dig for that spark,
you've got to
keep going..."
Michael
Kiwanuka,
Islington,
30 March, 2016.



MICHAEL KIWANUKA

Like many singer-songwriters, **MICHAEL KIWANUKA** struggled to find his place in the world. Unlike many, that struggle continued even when the acclaim, awards and hits amassed. The problem, he tells **LAURA BARTON**, is that he didn't fit in anywhere and he didn't think his music was very good. But then he had a eureka moment recording his second album...

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW COTTERILL

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE



The pub is near-empty when Michael Kiwanuka slips in – a slight figure with a crown of an Afro and a wreath of a beard, half-eclipsing the sunlight that floods through the windows.

It is four years since Kiwanuka won BBC's Sound of 2012 poll, and since the release of his debut album, *Home Again*. Then, every boutique and wine bar seemed to hum with the sound of his voice: a folk-phrased Bill Withers with a ring of Terry Callier and Otis Redding. But he made for an unassuming pop star: a handsome, well-mannered young man, trailing no great scandal in his wake, causing little disturbance.

This year he returns with *Home Again*'s successor, *Love & Hate* [review p102]. Though it rouses once more that exquisite voice, it is perhaps not quite the album one might have anticipated; this is a stronger, sleeker, more defiant collection of songs, addressing matters of race and faith and love,

and bringing a new pulse of muscularity and ambition to Kiwanuka's music.

It is still the milder Kiwanuka I meet first today, ordering a latte, talking about pubs and car journeys and Jimi Hendrix, recalling his time at the Royal Academy of Music and his years as a teenage skateboarder, when every Saturday he would skip out of his Muswell Hill neighbourhood in North London to hang out with the other skaters on the Southbank.

He gave up skateboarding soon after he bought a guitar – protective, suddenly, of his limbs and his fingers. "Because you have to hurt yourself to get better at skateboarding," he explains as he waits for his coffee. "But I'm still obsessed with it. I've got a skateboard, and there's a skateboard park near where I live – I skate there in the mornings sometimes, before the kids get there. They're much better than me. But I love it." The feeling, he says, is a bit like music. "It's just you. It's your battle. And it feels quite free."

Yet there was a long stretch of time in the last four years, when music stopped giving him that feeling. "The same tricks didn't really work," is how he puts it now. "And the more you hear of yourself the less interesting it is. The same melodies were boring, the same style of songs I was writing just seemed

to be rehashing old ground." For a while he wondered if he might ever make another record again. "I thought maybe I should give this up," he says, "because it's not as fun as it used to be as a kid."

He had already recorded an album's worth of songs by the time his manager suggested he tried collaborating with other people. At first Kiwanuka balked at the idea. "I usually work on my own," he explains. "But it just got too much, and I had no other options."

He was introduced first to British hip-hop producer Inflo, and then to Brian Burton, the US producer better known as Danger Mouse, famed for his work with Gnarls Barkley, the Black Keys and Gorillaz. "And that really unlocked it," says Kiwanuka. "Wheat and chaff – that's what Brian and Flo were like. I'd throw loads of stuff at them, and eventually one out of 10 ideas would be any good. They wouldn't settle [for anything less]."

It was Burton, he says, who taught him not to shy away from the idea of appealing to the masses. "Before I met Brian, I thought to be commercially successful you'd have to make sacrifices to the music," Kiwanuka explains. "And if it had loads of intent, or heart or authenticity, it would sell a couple of records and you'd have to struggle away. But he's had

"The same melodies were boring, the same style of songs I was writing just seemed to be rehashing old ground. I thought maybe I should give this up because it's not as fun as it used to be as a kid."

"Er, can someone help me with this lot?" Backstage at London's Cadogan Hall, March 2016.

hits, he's very good at connecting music with people and what he made me see was the potential that a song could be commercially viable as well as being creative. I wanted this album to be more authentic, but he saw a way to also make it connect with more people, to make it be more straightforward and to the point, to be more dangerous with the lyrics."

It's a startling lyrical honesty that marks this record. I'll Never Love, for example, talks of an inability to make an emotional connection, of making love "but only for the night", while Father's Child talks of his faith. "That brutal honesty, it's a bit addictive, it's like pure therapy," he smiles. "It's like if you've got a bad back and you go to a chiropractor and you realise how good it feels and you just want to keep clicking your back."

Showing them to other people, singing them live, has proved more daunting however. "I feel like I'm in an AA meeting admitting to really bad shit that I've done," he says. "But with anything creative you just have to put yourself out there and go for it. It's like with the skateboarding – my favourite skateboarders, like Andy Reynolds, they cane themselves. And you don't see that, you just see the videos where they do the tricks. You don't see their battles where they try to put

those tricks together, their broken arms, their bad knees. But with anything in life, if you want to feel it at its fullest you have to put yourself out there."

It was a process that began, he says, with the album's lead single, Black Man In A White World – a song that began two weeks into working with Inflo. It was a Thursday afternoon, he remembers, shortly before he had to leave the studio: a sudden burst of long-lost creativity that arrived first

as an acoustic, country-style tune before taking on its a cappella, Son House flavour. "It sounded like a slave song, like a clapping song," Kiwanuka recalls. "And then I got the electric guitar and it sounded like a soul song." It is a tremendous track – a marriage of pop-hook and civil rights anthem, which post-Ferguson, post-Beyoncé's Superbowl performance, seems strikingly powerful.

But then he forgot about it. "I was a bit down," he says. "That was during the time I wasn't really up for making music. So I didn't go to the studio for a while and I forgot about the song." Instead he "just hung out. Went to the pub. Listened

to a lot of old soul, '70s records, Isaac Hayes... I started drinking coffee – I never used to drink coffee." He pauses. "I wasn't doing anything really."

He considers this for a moment. In fact, he concludes, he was doing something: "I was distracting myself, I was trying to avoid the issue that I maybe couldn't write songs any more, that the first album was a fluke."

But then, a month or two later, Inflo sent Kiwanuka the demo of their song. "And I was like, 'Whoa! Is this what we did?'" he beams. "I'd never made a piece of music like this before, but I was obviously so depressed that I wasn't really listening at the time. And it sounded like someone else singing it. It sounded like someone I was into. I sounded more liberated, more loose. I thought I'm into this. And so I rang him up and said we've got to do more stuff. And more music came."

What he learned, he says, is that you have to dig for inspiration. "You dig dig dig dig dig," he says, suddenly animated. "And you're digging, but the thing that's good is it's still the spark that you don't understand. You've got to dig for it, you've got to keep going. You're almost digging to make your brain stop. And your brain stops, and the spark comes. And you build around the spark."

Aside from Inflo and Danger Mouse, there is also, on this album, the influence of Kanye West – not physically, not tangibly, not there in the liner notes, but somewhere underneath, perhaps, bolstering its tunes.

West approached Kiwanuka while he was working on Yeezus, flying him over to his recording complex in Hawaii to try out some vocals. Kiwanuka still sounds dazed as he recalls the experience: "I stayed in a hotel and in the morning this guy would pick me up and drive me to the studio," he remembers. "It was another world. I'd walk into the main room and Kanye West... it was literally like he was on a throne – all his people were round him, asking his opinions on his clothing line, his chef would be serving him soup, he'd be making beats, he was king of the castle and I'd never seen anything like that. It was a full-on operation, like a modern-day Motown."

Kiwanuka, though, was thrown. "I had never collaborated with anyone then," he says. "I didn't really know what it was like to work in the studio with someone where their background was different in terms of how they make music – where beats were first and vocals last." Every morning they would hand him a microphone and send him upstairs to sing over a set of chords. "And I didn't know how to do that," he says. "I didn't even know how to use Pro Tools. I kept having to stop people when they were walking past and say, 'Can you help me?' I was a bit overwhelmed."

He stayed for five fruitless days, each morning wondering, 'What am I doing here?', before heading back to London. Some months later he was invited to join Kanye again in Paris. "I didn't really want to go," he admits. "I was a bit self-conscious about it." They invited him to sing on the track I Am A God, but Kiwanuka, a practising Christian, was not keen. "I thought I'm not really up for singing on a song called I Am A God. I don't think Kanye's a god. But I didn't know how to do it as well. So I just kind of left..." He looks a little sheepish. "I left the studio and went home. They never called me back." >>



"Kick out the jams, Kiwanuka!" Working on Love & Hate with producer Danger Mouse.

It would be different now, he says. "I'm glad I did it, it opened me up to the idea of collaboration, but I reckon if I were to do that now it would be better. Now, I wouldn't be so scared about getting something wrong. Then I really cared. I had low self-esteem."

Kiwanuka mentions his low self-esteem frequently throughout our time together, to the point where it is hard not to ask where its origin might lie. "Not to put too much weight on that song, but *Black Man In A White World* talks about that," he says gently. "I think deep down my low self-esteem is because I never really fitted in with the stereotypes of black culture, I always felt on the edge."

The son of Ugandan immigrants, the young Kiwanuka found there weren't many black people in Muswell Hill. "And you're always looking for someone to relate to, who looks like you, when you're a kid," he says. "As a teenager I followed this black skater Kareem Campbell, because there aren't many black skaters, so as soon as you find one you're like, 'Right, *him*.' Or as soon as I found Hendrix, I thought, 'He's got an Afro and he's playing rock! Well, I can do it too.'"

But even the Afro was problematic. "At 15 or 16 I had long hair, but it wasn't that cool for black people to have an afro then," he remembers. "And there was no black barber in Muswell Hill, and no one could really cut black people's hair in Muswell Hill, so you had to go to Wood Green." And barber shop culture, he reminds me, is a thing. "So I would go to the barbers, I'd walk in and everyone would go, 'Man, this guy's hair is like crazy!' and you'd get a few laughs. And then in the barber shop you just chatted rubbish for a while. You'd talk about stuff. And I never really felt like I connected with anyone in the barbershop. I'd feel I don't really fit here, I don't want to be here. There'd be all these conversations about what was happening in Wood Green. And I wasn't really part of Wood Green, I didn't have any friends there. The things they were talking about, I didn't have any connection to. The kind of music they liked was different too – I was obsessed with Hendrix, and the first wave of grime was happening then. But I didn't relate to that – that music is very much about the environment, and I'm from Muswell Hill. There's nothing grime about Muswell Hill."

But he found he didn't entirely fit in elsewhere either. At 18 he was accepted for a place to study jazz at the Royal College of Music, but immediately felt out of his depth. "I couldn't read music like everyone else," he says. "I didn't have the same background as them. Most of the people who go to a conservatoire like that have been to the Purcell School or Chetham's School of Music,



"It was like Kanye West was on a throne. His people were round him, his chef would be serving him soup, he'd be making beats. He was king of the castle."

where they groom you to that level. I didn't have that. I thought cos I'd done the audition and passed I'd be fine. But every lesson, every week, was like a baptism of fire.

"I thought studying jazz was a good way to become a musician," he continues, "and I'm glad it happened, but it affected my self-esteem that I didn't fit into that world. It was very much a world you had to be born into, like golf or tennis. Also there were no black people in that world."


The feeling must continue, I say. If you consider the British music industry, from the record company executive to the radio pluggers, festival line-ups, press officers and journalists, it is still quite staggeringly white.

"Yeah, yeah," he nods. "I never spoke to a black journalist. I don't know if I should be more annoyed about that. It doesn't bug me but maybe it should. And that song is kind of about that, but it's more about people's expectations of what I should be doing." He thinks for a moment. "I suppose one thing

that I see now is there's not that many black people at my gigs. My music isn't speaking to that culture yet. So that's where I feel it."

Later that evening, Kiwanuka plays Cadogan Hall in Chelsea. It's a curious venue to unveil such a passionate album – seated and sedate, the audience before him markedly white, and in a part of London where the streets themselves feel rarefied.

Onstage Kiwanuka's presence is a balance of ease and intensity, and he attacks his new songs with gusto. But the set is dominated by a video backdrop showing footage of a black man walking through a forest, the images overlaid with a procession of paired antonyms: "Love" and "Hate", for instance, "Freedom" and "Slavery". After a while it seems unnecessary, its presence too overbearing, its message too heavy-handed.

I think of Kiwanuka earlier, the way he sat in the sunshine of a North London pub, talking so lightly of periods in his life which must have felt distressing. I think of how calmly he spoke of the times he has felt overwhelmed: in the barber shop and at music college, under the weight of writing a second album, as well as in the court of King Kanye. I remember how he looked at me, as if half-apologising, when he noted that he had never been interviewed by a black journalist. And I think of how politely he presents himself onstage tonight, in this exclusive part of town, the video screen spelling out his message as if for the hard of hearing. And I think how wonderful it would be to see Michael Kiwanuka less submerged; to see him live as he writes – not muted or struggling or one chord behind, but with the confidence and contentment of a man who has made his own world. 

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Scottish power: Mogwai
(clockwise from top
left, Stuart Braithwaite,
Martin Bulloch, Dominic
Aitchison, Barry Burns),
Castle Of Doom Studios,
Glasgow, 24 March, 2016.



PORTRAITS JENNIFER WICKS

MOGWAI

➔ Post-rock veterans **Mogwai** were once described as “Glaswegian piss-takers who happen to be very serious about their music.” Twenty years on, it’s a tag that still holds true. **Simon Goddard** meets the band on the eve of the release of their Atomic soundtrack album, to talk politics, “garbage” song titles and find out who’s to blame for their cheesecake obsession...

There are two sounds of Mogwai. The one on record and onstage: a mostly instrumental melodic blood rush peaking in occasional

tsunamis of Biblical white noise, never better described than by the late critic Steven Wells as “like being told to fuck off by God.” And there’s the other which greets Q on entering their control room in March 2016: a Scottish thunder of incapacitated laughter peeling from four best pals breaking ribs in each other’s company. Were it not for the interior soundproofing and the exterior sandstone of the former Savings Bank Of Glasgow – a baronial late-19th century fortress now housing their aptly-named Castle Of Doom Studios – you suspect their combined belly howls would be rattling the windscreen wipers of the parked cars outside.

Between signing advance copies of their new soundtrack album Atomic, today’s pandemic mirth is the result of being asked to consider the highs and lows of their 20-year

career as long-distance runners of ’90s post-rock. Among them the scurrilous rumour that before guitarist Barry Burns joined the band in 1998, mainman Stuart Braithwaite, bassist Dominic Aitchison and drummer Martin Bulloch were once so poor they tried to get drunk by soaking tampons in vodka and shoving them up their arses.

“See, that is just not true!” hoots Braithwaite, now casting a suspicious look at a giggling Burns. “Did you think we’d done it?”

“Aye,” grins Burns.

“That’s why Barry joined the band,” quips Aitchison. “He’s waiting every night: ‘So when do the tampons come out?’”

Braithwaite (to Burns): “I can’t *believe* you fucking believed it!”

“Apparently it’s something they used to do in Norway when vodka was too expensive,” Aitchison tries to explain. “Like I remember hearing the one about putting a slit in your head and then putting on gaffer tape, and then putting a hat over so the glue slowly melted into your head.”

Burns: “What, *you* did?”

“Aw, Jesus,” Braithwaite sighs, turning to Q wearily. “Please note... WE’VE NOT TRIED THAT EITHER!”

And another infectious squall of Mogwai hilarity whips around the studio like Storm Katie.

Now hitting their 40s, the Mogwai of 2016 aren’t so very different from the incorrigible Kappa-kitted scamps bugling “we hate everyone” in the pre-millennial

post-Britpop vacuum, their most famous piece of merchandising still a 1999 T-shirt declaring “Blur: are shite”. All that’s changed since is the recent amicable departure of original guitarist John Cummings; a greater independence now self-releasing on their own Rock Action label since 2010; and a musical evolution from overdriven guitar maelstrom to subtler string and electronic soundscapes, the taut moods of Atomic a case in point. But as people, and more importantly as friends, they remain the self-deprecating definition of what it is to be Scottish: forever chasing the laugh where there’s one to be had (Braithwaite’s answer to our opening question if he’d describe himself a maverick: “Well, he is my favourite character in Top Gun”) and inherently allergic to flattery. In 2015, Mogwai marked their 20th anniversary with a series of shows at London’s Roundhouse, one attended by The Cure’s Robert Smith who afterwards told Burns how brilliant they were. “I was like, ‘Nah, nah,’” Burns recalls. “My wife was there nudging me saying, ‘Just take a compliment.’ And I said, ‘I can’t. I’m Scottish.’”

Glasgow-born Aitchison aside, all grew up on the fringes of the city in South >>

Lanarkshire, a locale Braithwaite once described as being so dull that kids sat around throwing stones at the moon. "Well, there's a lot of idiots in Lanarkshire," he laughs, "lots of people burning cars and all that." Aged 19, Braithwaite had already decided their name, that of the bat-eared furball from Gremlins, when he assembled Mogwai in the summer of 1995, first rehearsing in Bulloch's house in East Kilbride. "My wee brother would come and sing with us," says the drummer. "He was nine. He'd just scream nonsense while we played. Then we'd dangle him out the window by his ankles."

After a month or so persevering with "faux grunge" songs they realised their best tunes were a handful of loud-quiet-loud instrumentals, among them *Summer*, one of several early independent singles which helped gain the vital patronage of Radio 1's John Peel. When fellow DJ Steve Lamacq later jokingly described them as "not a band you'd spend your last fiver on", for their debut Peel session they sarcastically renamed a song *Mogwai Salute The Brilliance Of Steve Lamacq* for the occasion. Lamacq later

apologised in person when introducing the then five-piece onstage at T In The Park. "He gave us a pound each," smiles Bulloch.

By the summer of 1997, now temporarily joined by former Teenage Fanclubber Brendan O'Hare, the brotherly bond had extended to individual nicknames and matching band tattoos: Braithwaite ("Plasmatron") on his upper arm, Bulloch ("Bionic") on his forearm, Aitchison ("Demonic") on the back of his neck; Cummings ("Captain Meat") and O'Hare ("The Relic", so-named because he was all of

"Violence was never really that appealing to me as a pastime..."
Stuart Braithwaite

six years their senior) were similarly inked. The pack mentality was reflected in that year's debut LP, *Mogwai Young Team*, aping the names of West Scotland youth gangs, a consciously ironic joke missed by some who thought these otherwise bright, well-educated skateboard kids were trying to pass themselves off as chib-carrying neds. "Do we look like we were ever in gangs?" Braithwaite recoils in mock-horror. "Nah, violence was never really that appealing to me as a pastime. The closest we got to any gang was being chased by them and getting called 'weirdos'."

Crowned by its twin epics of *Like Herod* and *Mogwai Fear Satan*, ...*Young Team* positioned them beside Canada's equally intense *Godspeed You! Black Emperor* and America's jazzier *Tortoise* at the vanguard of the '90s amorphous "post-rock" genre. Except Mogwai themselves felt their debut bore the flaws of its long and stressful creation, choosing its Glasgow launch party to vow not to release their next unless it was as good as *The Velvet Underground's White Light/White Heat*; a pledge allegedly made in the venue's toilets, their trousers around their ankles.

"That is true," says Braithwaite. "I believe so. I remember the discussion. I don't remember where my trousers were. Maybe they were down because I was probably doing a piss."

All eyes suddenly turn on Braithwaite. "You piss with your trousers down?" jibes Aitchison. "Like, *right* down?"

And, again, the rafters rumble with Celtic hysteria.

Before joining Mogwai, their friend Barry Burns had been training to be a primary music teacher, a career he rejected when he belatedly realised, "I hate children". His inaugural gig, playing flute, was at Dundee Caird Hall in September 1998 as part of a tour supporting *Manic Street Preachers*, whose fans took to Mogwai like a duck to tarmac. "The first night went fine, but then the second night in Chester the crowd hated us," says Aitchison. "One guy was waving at me, got my attention and



THE
BEST
OF

MOGWAI

Symphonies of noise, unsettling ballads, politically-charged epics and a *Top Gear* favourite...

1 *Mogwai Fear Satan* Mogwai *Young Team* (1997)

Inspired by the brimstone nightmares of bassist Dominic Aitchison's Catholic upbringing, an otherwise divine symphony of noise.

2 *Cody Come On* Die Young (1999)

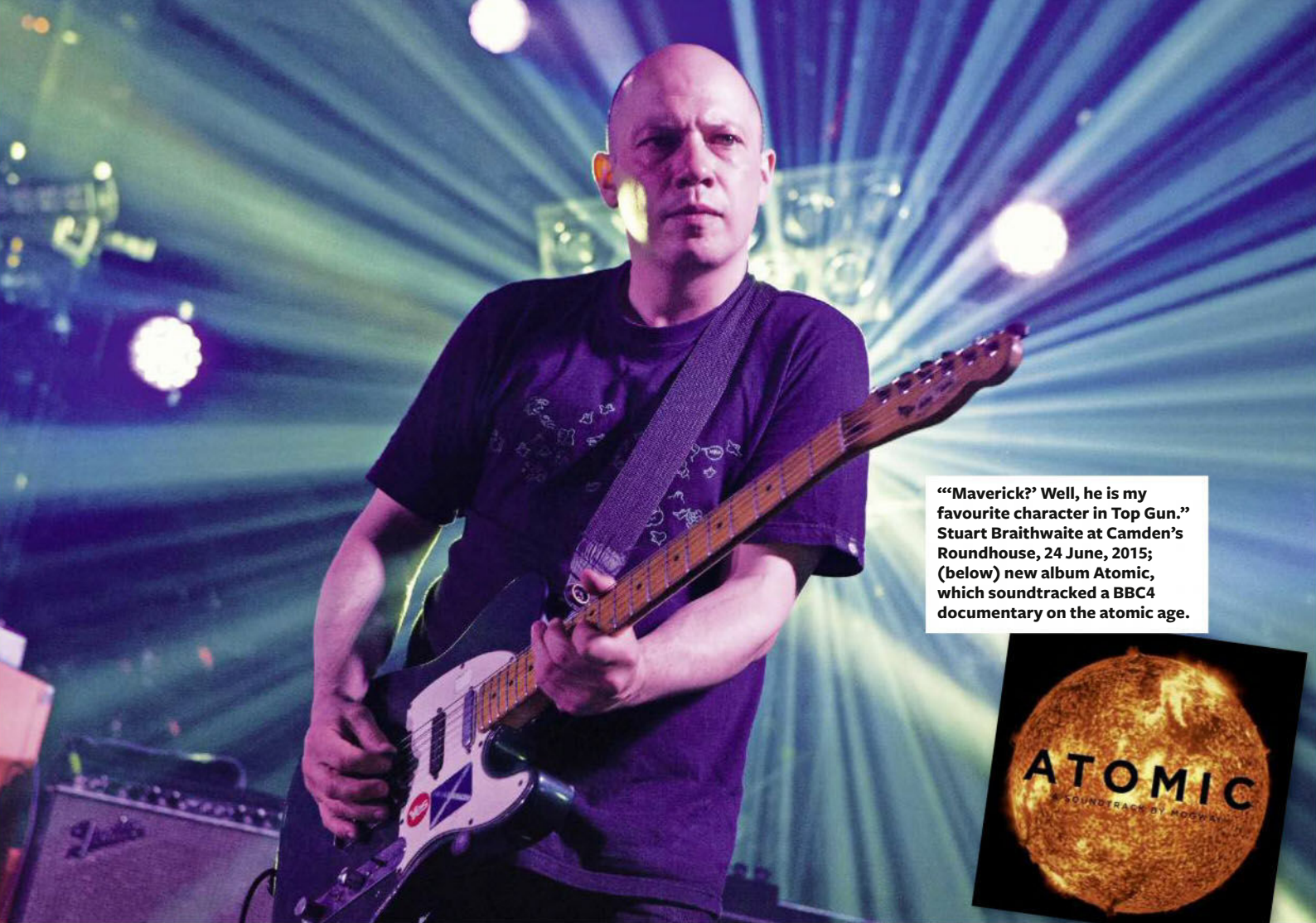
For a man who usually plays the guitar like Beelzebub on steroids, when Stuart Braithwaite sings, as on this affecting ballad, he's unexpectedly tender.

3 *My Father, My King* Single (2001)

Taking the melody and English title of the Jewish prayer *Avinu Malkeinu*, this 20-minute monster builds and builds to a synagogue-shattering volume.

4 *Hunted By A Freak* Happy Songs For Happy People (2003)

Add Thom Yorke and this *could be* Radiohead. Instead, guitarist Barry Burns's eerie vocoder vocals lend it a singular weirdness of their own.



“‘Maverick?’ Well, he is my favourite character in *Top Gun*.” Stuart Braithwaite at Camden’s Roundhouse, 24 June, 2015; (below) new album *Atomic*, which soundtracked a BBC4 documentary on the atomic age.



then went [*shakes aggressive middle finger*]. So after that point we thought, ‘Let’s just get it right up these fucking cunts!’ I even mooned one guy in Wales. It’s very liberating when you know it’s not your audience and you can piss them off as much as you want.”

“The Manics had travelling fans so it would be the same front row every night,” says Bulloch. “By the last week these girls in the front row were standing with their backs to us giving us the finger from behind.”

One show even saw Braithwaite fall asleep onstage on Nicky Wire’s bass cabinet during the Manics’ set. “That tour I remember some lassie down the front shouting at me that I ate cheesecake all day,” he adds. “Because I was quite fat then. The thing was I’d never even tried cheesecake. So I tried it the next day, and now I really love it.” He cackles

wickedly. “So, thanks, angry ’90s goth! Eat cheesecake all day? Fucking do now, ya cow.”

With Burns replacing the long-departed O’Hare, for their second album they decamped to a remote studio in Chautauqua County, New York State, with Flaming Lips producer Dave Fridmann, surrounded by forest, wild dogs and limey-scaring deer hunters; one laser-targeting Bulloch after hearing him complain about the amount of guns for sale in the local convenience store. “It sounds like the kind of place you would never go to again, doesn’t it?” says Braithwaite, adding the punchline that they’re returning there to make their ninth album later this year.

True to that toilet pact, 1999’s *Come On Die Young* better fulfilled their expectations, surprising fans and critics with its mellow

textures and the shock of Braithwaite’s gentle vocals on acronym title track *Cody* – a trend that has continued ever since as, with each album, Mogwai tweak their formula by introducing new elements while never forfeiting the dynamic drama that set them apart in the first place. If the music is a meticulous, sometimes sombre business (Braithwaite jokes that if they were ever asked to soundtrack a Batman film “it would be two hours of Bruce Wayne crying over his parents’ grave”), the given titles – eg, *Secret Pint*, *You’re Lionel Richie* or *I’m Jim Morrison*, *I’m Dead* – cannot help betray its creators’ absurd Scottish humour.

“Ninety per cent of them are garbage,” says Bulloch, who acts as filter of the candidates usually conceived while “steaming” on the tourbus. “Some of them >>

5 **Auto Rock Mr Beast** (2006)

Contender for their most appropriated TV tune, even your dad probably knows this piano-driven tension builder from watching *Top Gear*.

6 **The Sun Smells Too Loud The Hawk Is Howling** (2008)

Sounding like their mate Gary Lightbody’s *Chasing Cars* if hijacked after two notes, this is Mogwai at their most hypnotically tuneful.

7 **George Square Thatcher Death Party Hardcore Will Never Die, But You Will** (2011)

Vocoder vocals and brawny bass combine on this prophetically-titled dance on Maggie’s grave.

8 **Hungry Face Les Revenants** (2013)

A fittingly unsettling lullaby for the returning dead, this was used as the title theme to the French supernatural drama series shown in the UK on More4.

9 **Remurdered Rave Tapes** (2014)

In which Mogwai imagine Kurt Russell’s Snake Plissken in *Escape From South Lanarkshire* and beat John Carpenter to the soundtrack.

10 **Weak Force Atomic** (2016)

The mature sound of Mogwai today: an eerie Cold War score to scenes of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster from Mark Cousins’s BBC4 documentary.

we've been crying with laughter at the night before and then you look at them the next day and they're pish."

"I got a good one today," smiles Braithwaite, who begins reading titles off his phone. "Get A Bus And Turn Into A Weirido... Sack The Family..."

His chuckling gathers momentum.

"...Is There A Particular Tune Of Ours That You Like Kissing To?"

The rest of Mogwai spontaneously combust.

"That's definitely getting used!" cheers Bulloch. "Next album title!"

A

tomic marks their third full soundtrack album, commissioned for a 2015 BBC4 documentary by Mark Cousins. "A nice guy," says Braithwaite of

the Northern Irish director, "goes crazy on the lady petrol [*white wine*]." Mogwai supply an appropriately chilling complement to Cousins's assembly of archive footage conveying "the dreams and nightmares of the atomic age" from the Manhattan Project to the disasters of Chernobyl and Fukushima. In contrast to their usual "steaming" song pool, the titles – eg, SCRAM (a term for a reactor shutdown) and U-235 (the uranium isotope used in the 1945 Hiroshima bomb) – respectfully befit the subject, some advised by a friend of the band working at the CERN research facility on the Franco-Swiss border, home of the Large Hadron Collider.

This summer they'll be playing Atomic live in a series of concert screenings, none more poignant than Hiroshima itself. Even missing the lyrical soapbox of traditional bands, Mogwai have never shied away from politics, whether their 1998 EP *No Education = No Future* (Fuck The Curfew) directed at a police initiative against Lanarkshire teenagers, 2011's uncanny *George Square* Thatcher Death Party predicting Glasgow's jubilant reaction when the former PM died two years later, or their concert for the Scottish referendum's fated pro-independence Yes campaign. "I'd like to think we're why it didn't succeed," deadpans Braithwaite.

When Alan McGee managed them in the noughties, his ultimate advice, says Braithwaite, "was that we didn't need a


manager", crediting their survival to a DIY punk rock mindset and a wilful isolationism in their own "Mogwai world". But, as Q's witnessed all day, there's also truth in McGee's simpler summation of the band as "a gang of Glaswegian piss-takers who happen to be very serious about their music." No topic is beyond the realms of conversational comedy, even when Bulloch, fitted with a pacemaker since he was eight, describes how he might've died when it fell out while playing a gig in New York State in September 2008. "The American hospital refused to treat me because the doctor said it was a mess," he explains. "I pointed out that if they didn't and I flew home with an open chest wound I could get an infection and die. The tit! They eventually patched me up, I went home and the next day was operated

on in Glasgow. So the NHS is where it's at. All you private doctors can suck ma baws!"

Nobody could ever accuse Mogwai of not enjoying themselves during their pursuit of art, an example Q suggests some younger bands today might do well to absorb. "Well, we were lucky that we were young and daft at a time when you were allowed to be young and daft," muses Braithwaite. "Like the 'Blur: are shite' T-shirt reflected our youthful impudence. That was really funny. Young bands today, I dunno. They seem really into their nutrition, don't they?"

"Whereas at their age we'd be going onstage hammered," smiles Aitchison. "Some nights we'd sound like an absolute rammy."

"They've all got brilliant fancy gear these bands today too," adds Bulloch. "Like great, brand new guitars and amps. And I'm like, 'Where are you getting that from? Jesus Christ! I got my drumkit on fucking tick!'"

There follows another prolonged, face-reddening, gut-clutching communal Mogwai laugh. Only a moon-stoning idiot would believe it'll be their last. 



Modelling Topman's autumn/winter 2016 collection.

"We were lucky in that we were young and daft at a time when you were allowed to be young and daft." **Stuart Braithwaite**

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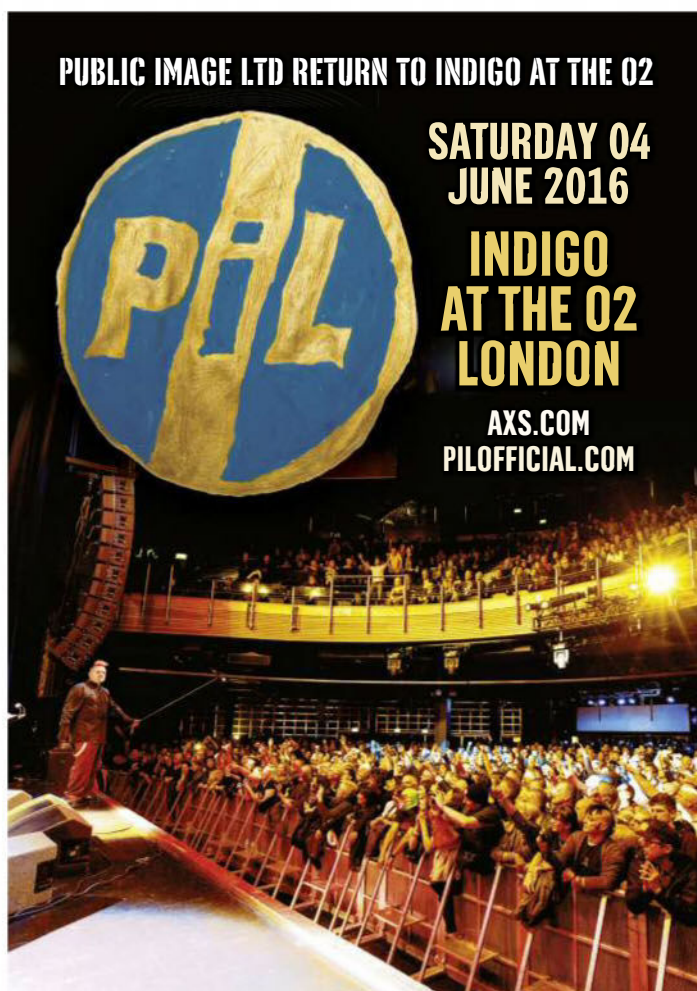
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A full-page photograph of Prince performing on stage. He is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored floral patterned shirt and a black mesh long-sleeved glove on his left arm. He is holding a light-colored electric guitar and has his mouth open as if singing or shouting. The background is dark with out-of-focus purple and blue stage lights.

1958 ♀ 2016

PRINCE

A 21-PAGE CELEBRATION OF HIS LIFE AND HIS MUSIC

Prince Rogers Nelson

7 June, 1958 – 21 April, 2016

In 1979, following the release of his eponymous second album, Prince reluctantly granted an interview to American teen magazine *Right On!*. “You know I don’t like to do interviews,” he said.

“But you have to so that people will know who you are,” the journalist countered.

“Why do they have to know who I am?”

You can’t say he didn’t warn us. Prince Rogers Nelson flooded us with music – 39 studio albums plus a sea of B-sides, bootlegs and generous contributions to other artists – while somehow remaining a distant, otherworldly presence. He was not, like Kate Bush in the silent middle of her career or Bowie in his final decade, unreachable but he was unknowable. That was the central paradox in a career full of them.

It’s important to recall how brave Prince was, starting out. He was in a tradition of black visionaries and dandies – Little Richard, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, Sly Stone, George Clinton – but he went further still. Here was a straight black man who didn’t describe himself as black and messed with masculinity. As he sang on *I Would Die 4 U*: “I’m not a woman, I’m not a man/I am something that you’ll never understand.” Rolling Stones fans booed the freak in the trenchcoat and underwear. Funk alpha male Rick James snorted, “He doesn’t even want to be black, and my job is to keep reality over this little science fiction creep.” But Prince made his own reality.

He came to stardom as an outsider from the white Midwest. Minneapolis was so behind the times that Prince had an incentive to create his own sound and take it to the whole nation. His first two albums revealed a prodigiously talented singer, songwriter, producer and performer but played relatively safe, sticking to funk and disco. Once he was flying, he took it all: new wave, hip-hop, soul, psychedelia, house, gospel, jazz, folk, Tin Pan Alley, stadium rock, Joni Mitchell, The Beatles, Bowie, Kraftwerk, the lot. And this polymathic control freak achieved a great deal of it single-handed. It’s no hyperbole to say that he was the most multi-talented musician pop has ever seen. If he had been just a songwriter or just a guitarist or just a showman or just a producer, he would have been one of the greats, but he was extraordinary on every front: a musical superhero. When he declared, “I am music” a few years ago, it didn’t sound unreasonable.

He hit the ’80s at full throttle. *Dirty Mind* and *Controversy* were outrageous provocations, sexual in a way that was as unsettling for some listeners as it was empowering for others. 1999 and *Purple Rain*, crossover without compromise, made him as popular as it was possible to be short of his arch-rival Michael Jackson. As critic Barney Hoskyns noted, Prince was the Stones to Jacko’s Beatles – he wanted to make pop dangerous again. “People should not worry what people

think of them, like it was in the ’60s,” he said. “Now it’s all commercial and cool. We’ll suffer a slow death like that.” In short: Let’s Go Crazy.

Purple Rain’s engulfing success shook him so hard that he had a breakdown and was rumoured to be retiring. Instead, he got weirder with the whimsical acid-pop of *Around The World In A Day* (his “FU” album) and conceptual psych-funk of *Parade*, then sacked his group, The Revolution, and made his magnum opus *Sign O’ The Times* – the most powerful one-stop evidence of his genius – as a one-man band.

Prince represented the ’80s at its most interesting: the strange, fracturing, freewheeling, postmodern, too-fast, too-much ’80s. His music was so experimental, so provocative (*Darling Nikki* triggered a wave of music industry censorship) and so much fun. You could dance to it, have sex to it, cry to it, be freaked out by it, reinvent yourself to it, and know that millions of other listeners were doing likewise. It didn’t matter that his political songs were rarely his best because his very existence felt revolutionary.

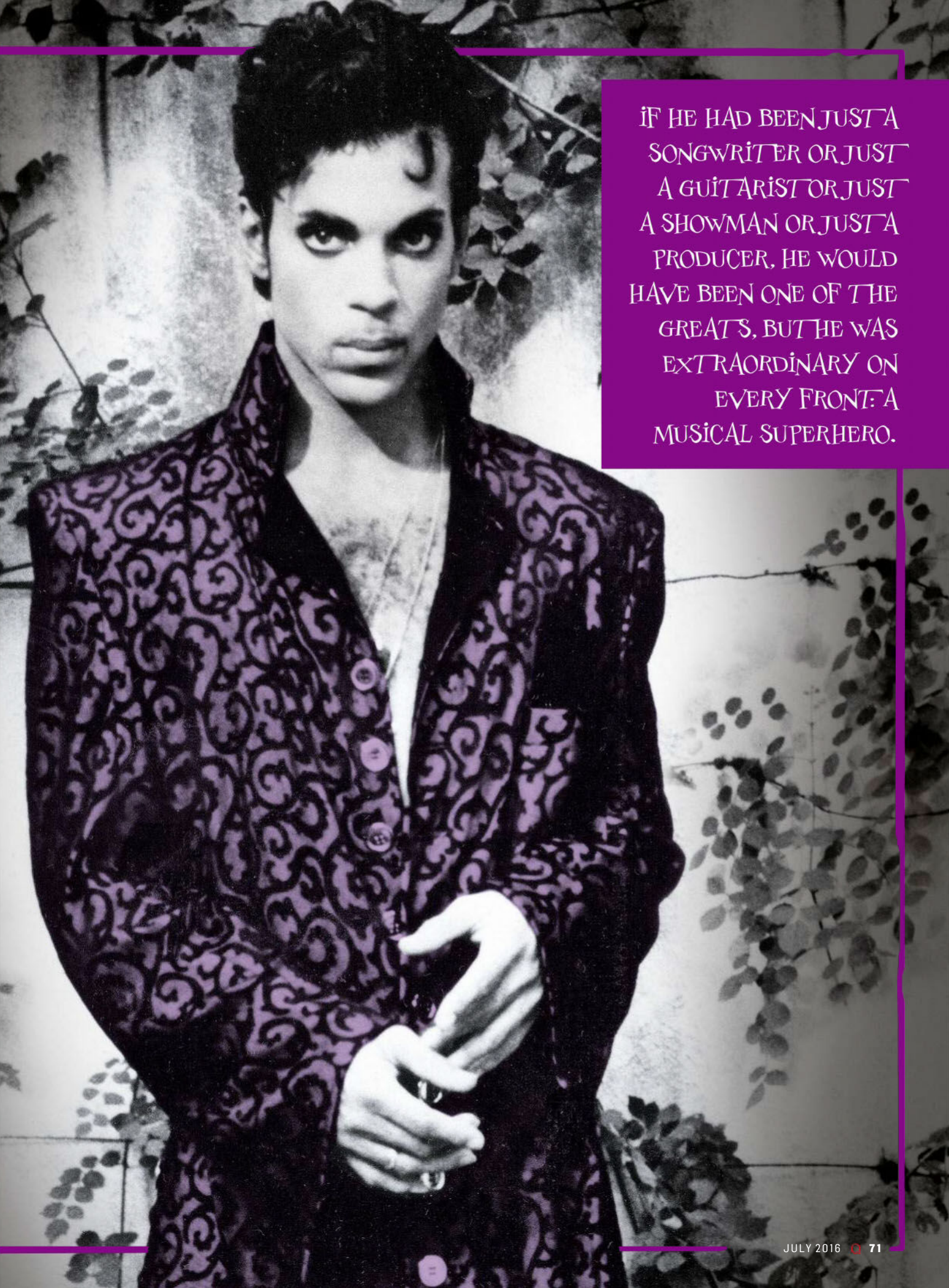
Anyone as fearlessly unconventional as Prince was bound to part company with the general public eventually. Following 1995’s *The Love Symbol Album*, the first album after his quixotic battle with Warner Bros, he lost the ability to make hits. He had always been weird, and proudly so, but Prince’s mysterious ways began to elicit mocking laughter now that his chart reign was over. Only diligent fans knew that he could also laugh at himself and took the time to find evidence of his enduring brilliance in the shapeless landslide of new material. Only his influence was undiminished and unavoidable. Try to imagine Pharrell, OutKast, Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Janelle Monáe, Miguel, Frank Ocean, D’Angelo, The Weeknd, Robyn or Hot Chip without him.

Prince regained focus with 2004’s *Musicology* and silenced all murmurings of decline with a 21-night residency at London’s O2 Arena in 2007. “You can’t handle me!” he cried on the opening night. “I got too many hits!” How could we ever have doubted him?

Nobody who saw Prince perform in recent years could have thought death was imminent. He seemed too agelessly vital, too delighted by his virtuosity and the joy it inspired, to slow down, let alone stop. His premature death is an unsuitably ugly end to a surreally beautiful career. Something in the water does not compute.

Prince didn’t leave us with a *Blackstar*, foreshadowing the end. You have to go back to his imperial phase to find him addressing mortality, and the message is always to live harder. “If I gotta die I’m gonna listen to my body tonight.” “All good things, they say, never last.” “We’re all excited but we don’t know why/Maybe it’s ’cos we’re all gonna die.”

“It’s just so nice to know there is someone and someplace else,” he said in 1985, discussing his spirituality. “And if we’re wrong, and I’m wrong, and there is nothing, then big deal! But the whole life I just spent, I at least had some reason to spend it.” **DORIAN LYNSEY**

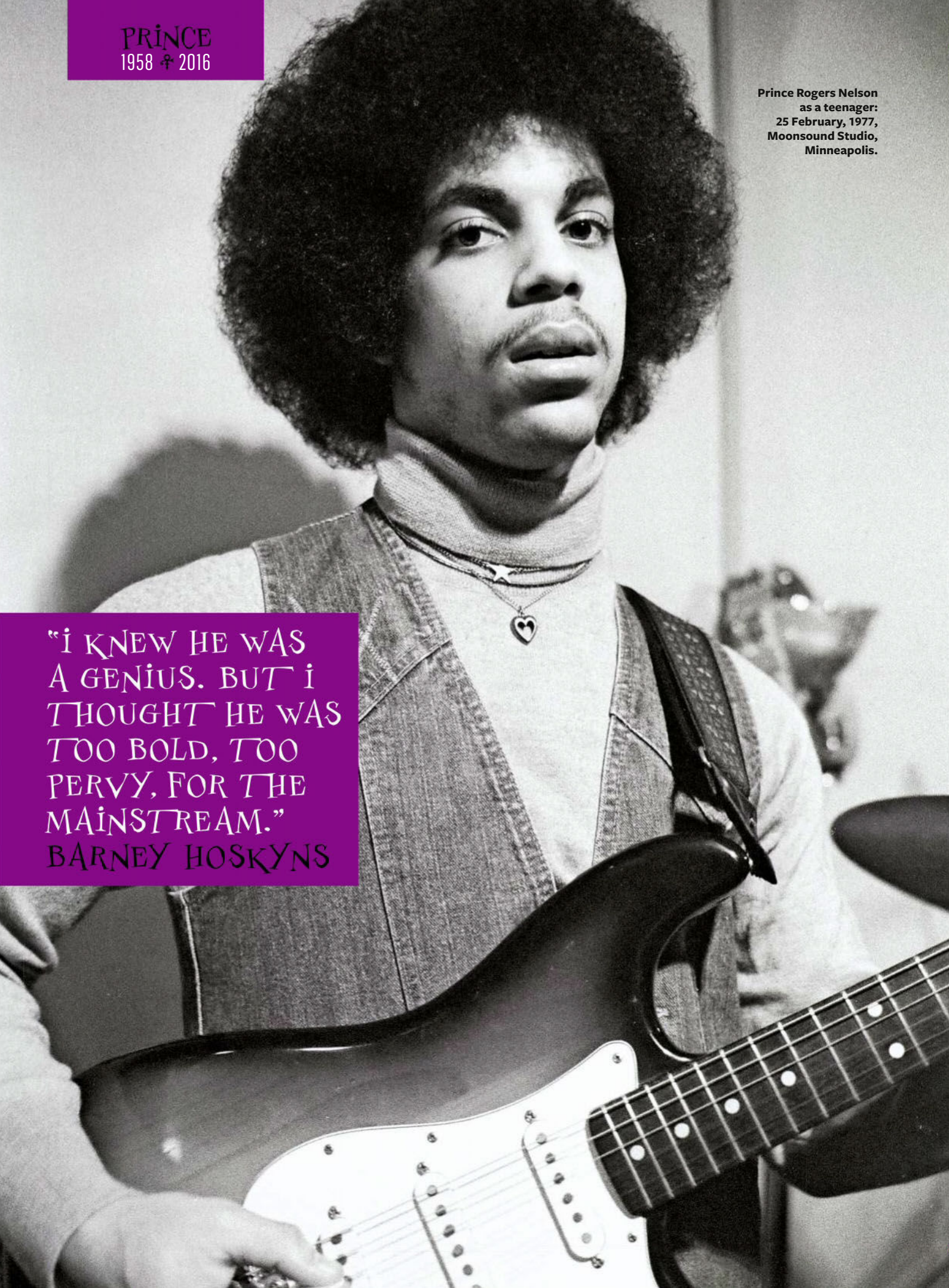


IF HE HAD BEEN JUST A
SONGWRITER OR JUST
A GUITARIST OR JUST
A SHOWMAN OR JUST A
PRODUCER, HE WOULD
HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE
GREATS, BUT HE WAS
EXTRAORDINARY ON
EVERY FRONT: A
MUSICAL SUPERHERO.

PRINCE
1958 ♀ 2016

Prince Rogers Nelson
as a teenager:
25 February, 1977,
Moonsound Studio,
Minneapolis.

"I KNEW HE WAS
A GENIUS. BUT I
THOUGHT HE WAS
TOO BOLD, TOO
PERVY, FOR THE
MAINSTREAM."
BARNEY HOSKYNs



In The Beginning

When Prince first performed in England in 1981 he made a lasting impression on those who saw him. But where had this fully-formed genius come from? Paul Elliott charts his rise from small Minneapolis clubs to music's centre-stage.

On the night of 2 June, 1981, when Prince walked out on to the stage at London's Lyceum Theatre – prancing in high-heeled boots, and clad in only briefs and stockings beneath a raincoat – he had to deliver.

For this, his debut live performance in the UK, the advance hype made Prince sound

almost too good to be true. In announcing the London show to the media, PR Tony Brainsby had stated: "Outrageous black American star Prince is being hailed as the natural successor to Michael Jackson, Jimi Hendrix and Mick Jagger." To live up to that billing would require something special. Some balls, for sure.

At that stage, Prince's name meant next to nothing outside of America, where his second album, named simply Prince, had sold a million, and the follow-up, his current record *Dirty Mind*, was close behind. In contrast, none of his albums had charted in the UK, only the single *I Wanna Be Your Lover*, and even that hadn't made the Top 40.

That night, the Lyceum was half empty, with fewer than a thousand people in attendance. But what they saw, in the 22-year-old Prince, was a legend in the making.

"I was in no doubt that I was witnessing a major talent," says Barney Hoskyns, then a writer for NME.

"He was so brilliant, a phenomenal live performer, and he had such presence. The guy oozed charisma. It was very clear that he had no doubts about his own ability."

In a set that drew heavily from *Dirty Mind* – a brilliant synthesis of hard funk and punchy, new wave-influenced rock'n'roll – Prince channelled the explicit sexual content of songs such as *Head* and *Do It All Night* into a lewd stage act in which his guitar wasn't just played but masturbated. What's more, he played that thing like a genuine guitar hero. And like everything he did – singing,

dancing and commanding the stage as he led his tightly drilled band – he made it look easy.

Barney Hoskyns had known what to expect. Six months earlier, he had seen Prince live at The Ritz in New York. "I was already converted," Hoskyns says. "I knew he was a genius. My mind was blown in New York." What he could not foresee was how far Prince's genius would carry him. "I didn't think he was going to be a superstar," Hoskyns says. "He was too bold, too pervy, for the mainstream. I didn't see him as a rival for Michael Jackson."

But that's exactly where Prince was headed.

Music was in Prince's blood. Born on 7 June, 1958 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, he was the child of jazz musicians: Mattie Shaw, a singer, and John L Nelson, a pianist. The father's stage name was Prince Rogers. It was passed on to his son, Prince Rogers Nelson, along with the dreams of a small-time musician. As John L Nelson said in a 1991 interview: "I named my son Prince because I wanted him to do everything I wanted to do."

The young Prince was a precocious talent. Aged seven, he wrote, on his father's piano, his first song – titled, significantly, *Funk Machine*. Three years later, after his parents separated, he lived with one or the other for various periods. Throughout this unsettled adolescence, music was his outlet and primary focus. Inspired by a wide array of

artists – James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Sly & The Family Stone, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Joni Mitchell – Prince became a self-taught multi-instrumentalist, mastering guitar, bass, drums and more.

He started out as a performer in conventional fashion, playing in a band named Grand Central, formed in 1973 when he was still in high school. With Prince on guitar and lead vocals, the group gigged mostly in local community centres and hotels, mixing covers of funk and rock standards. In time, they developed some original material, written by Prince with

Prince's Greatest Works: No.1



PRINCE (1979)

With its raw urgency, Prince's second album contains many signposts to what would later mark him out as a superstar. *I Wanna Be Your Lover*,

his first major pop triumph, is a plush R&B anthem while *Bambi* is the sort of balls-out rock he revisited on 2014's *Plectrumelectrum* album.



Full Nelson: (from left) boy wonder – Prince wrote his first song, aged seven, called Funk Machine; a besuited Prince (second right) with early band Grand Central; stocking-filler – performing at his 26th birthday party, Minneapolis, 7 June, 1984.

DUPLICATE
TRANSPARENCY



DUPLICATE
TRANSPARENCY

FOR PRINCE, KICKING FUNK RIVAL RICK JAMES'S ASS WAS NOT ENOUGH. SOON, HE'D BE GUNNING FOR MICHAEL JACKSON...

bassist André Cymone. In an echo of James Brown, and of Sly Stone, one of their songs was named Sex Machine.

Prince and Cymone were tight. After Prince left his mother's home following a row with his stepfather, he lived with Cymone's family. According to Cymone, "My mother adopted him." Even so, Grand Central was shortlived, and although the pair collaborated again in 1975, writing and recording with another Minneapolis band, 94 East, the following year saw Prince venturing out as a solo artist.

First, he recorded a demo tape of new songs with local producer Chris Moon. When that failed to secure him a record deal, Moon found a backer in businessman Owen Husney, who became Prince's manager, and financed a high quality demo that led to Prince signing with Warner Brothers. Given that Prince was still only 19, the deal was something of an act of faith. He was afforded complete artistic control, which extended to a veto of Warners' suggested producer for Prince's debut album – Maurice White, leader of one of America's most successful soul-funk acts, Earth Wind & Fire.

Warners executives soon had reason to question the wisdom of this agreement. Left to his own devices, the teenage auteur created an album, 1978's *For You*, on which he played and sang every note. And while there were signs of what was to come – in the wondrous a cappella title track, and the naughtiness of *Soft And Wet* – the album bombed. Its US chart peak: 163.

It was, however, just a temporary setback. In 1979, with the album that bore his name, Prince nailed it. At a time when disco was still king, *I Wanna Be Your Lover* – as smooth and sophisticated as Chic, with

Prince cooing come-ons in his sweetest falsetto – hit Number 22 in the US, and propelled the album to platinum status. And on another brilliant track, *Bambi*, heavy metal guitar histrionics served notice of his rock'n'roll sensibilities.

The backing band for his 1979 tour was styled on Sly & The Family Stone: black and white, male and female. André Cymone was on bass, and Gayle Chapman was one of two keyboard players, the first of many female musicians who would be incorporated into Prince's ever-evolving retinue, a tradition continued in his 2014 outfit 3rdEyeGirl. This was more than mere symbolism. What followed was, in the words of Rolling Stone, "the most generous album about sex ever made by a man."

Released in 1980, *Dirty Mind* was an erotically charged funk masterpiece, as genre-definitive for the new decade as James Brown's *The Payback* was in the '70s. Famously, the finished album was comprised of demo recordings: so good, nothing was added. The music was modernistic, heavily influenced by new wave. As an indication

of the one-track subject matter, Prince wore on the album's cover photo a pin-badge common to the British 2-Tone ska revival of the time, its slogan: "Rude Boy." "The result," said Rolling Stone's reviewer, "is cool music dealing with hot emotions."

Prince's 1980 US tour as support act to Rick James turned into an epic funk battle and sparked a long running rivalry between them. But if their music was broadly similar – the phrase James used, "punk funk", was equally applicable to *Dirty Mind* – their lifestyles were polar opposites. Teetotal and drug-free, Prince was the antithesis of the

Prince's Greatest Works: No 2



CONTROVERSY (1981)

On his straightest funk record, he married sexual musings (most bluntly on *Sexuality*, *Do Me*, *Baby and Jack U Off*) to lyrical themes of religion and

social politics. "Am I black or white?/Am I straight or gay?" he sings on the smooth groove of the title track, revelling in the curiosity that his emergence had caused.



Prince's Greatest Works: No 3



1999 (1982)

The album that made Prince a star. The previous year's *Controversy* had suggested he was a new kind of mainstream artist but here he went into overdrive,

armed with both potent pop grooves (the title track and the irrepressible *Little Red Corvette*) and conceptual, experimental jams (*Lady Cab Driver*). The tone for the rest of his decade was set.

coke-snorting, brandy-swiggling James. In the long run, there would be only one winner. And for Prince, kicking Rick James's ass was not enough. Soon, he'd be gunning for Michael Jackson...

For Prince, the rise to superstardom was not entirely smooth. In October 1981, four months after the Lyceum show, his fourth album *Controversy* was released. And while it made the US Top 30, it quickly fell away.

There were flashes of brilliance in *Controversy* – notably in its title track, an electro-funk juggernaut. As NME's Ian Penman noted: "His constructive appliance of synth techniques assures that the sheer aesthetic and structural power of the music – thud and skim, shudder and tightening – has as much in common with Kraftwerk as with the more obvious Hendrix and harmony funk lineage." It was also with this album that Prince brought religion and politics into the mix. Cold War-era paranoia informed *Ronnie, Talk To Russia* – a tongue-in-cheek address to President Ronald Reagan. And in that self-mythologising title track, he mused upon sexual ambiguity before reciting from *The Lord's Prayer*.



Clash of the funk titans: with Rick James (right), 1980.

"The screwiest thing about *Controversy* is the dispersed division between rosy-cheeked humanist and slutty confessional," Penman concluded. "The Moral Majority will not know whether to fete or castrate this hammy spiritualist."

What the album lacked was a hit single. Two years after *I Wanna Be Your Lover* reached Number 11 in the US, four singles from *Controversy* failed. And worse, in the week that the album was released, Prince suffered the greatest humiliation of his career. On 9 October, The Rolling Stones played

the first of two shows at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Eighty-thousand Stones fans were happy to indulge two of the support acts, George Thorogood and The J Geils Band. But for Prince, the reaction was outright hostility. After two songs, he was booed off.

In order for Prince to cross over to a white rock audience, he needed to translate that rock'n'roll sensibility into a hit song. It came, in 1983, with *Little Red Corvette*, from the album that took his career to a whole new level – 1999.


Prince threw everything he had at 1999. Its euphoric title track, the lead single, was an explosion of sound, so much bigger than anything he had previously recorded. As a double album, 1999 was a grand statement with echoes of landmark releases by two of Prince's musical forebears: Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland* and Stevie Wonder's *Songs In The Key Of Life*. And while 1999 did not have the range of those albums – straight-up funk was still Prince's default setting – *Little Red Corvette* had guitars pushed up in the mix, and a palpable rock'n'roll attitude.

Timing was everything. The 1999 album was released in October 1982, a month before Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. And as Jackson started to gain major exposure on MTV – the first black artist to do so, due in no small part to the pressure applied by his record label Epic – the door was opened for Prince. The title track from 1999 hit Number 12 on the US chart. *Little Red Corvette*, its video given heavy rotation on MTV, went to Number 6.

1999 was the big breakthrough for Prince. Top 10 in the US, Top 30 in the UK. It wasn't as big as *Thriller*. Nothing was. More than 30 years later, nothing has been. But there was another fundamental difference between the two. On *Thriller*, Jackson utilised the best talent at his disposal: producer Quincy Jones, songwriters such as Rod Temperton, and guest star cameos from Paul McCartney, Eddie Van Halen and Vincent Price. On 1999, guitarist Dez Dickerson played lead on *Little Red Corvette*, and three female singers were featured – Lisa Coleman, Wendy Melvoin and Jill Jones. Everything else – songwriting, production, instrumentation – was all Prince's own work.

1999 was a seminal album for R&B music. Its rhythmic codes, drum machines and prominent synthesizers defined the Minneapolis sound, whose exponents in the '80s included Alexander O'Neal (briefly the singer for Prince's pet band *The Time*) and Janet Jackson, sister of Michael, whose biggest hits were produced and co-written by two members of *The Time*, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. The influence of that sound would subsequently extend into other forms of dance music, principally house and techno.

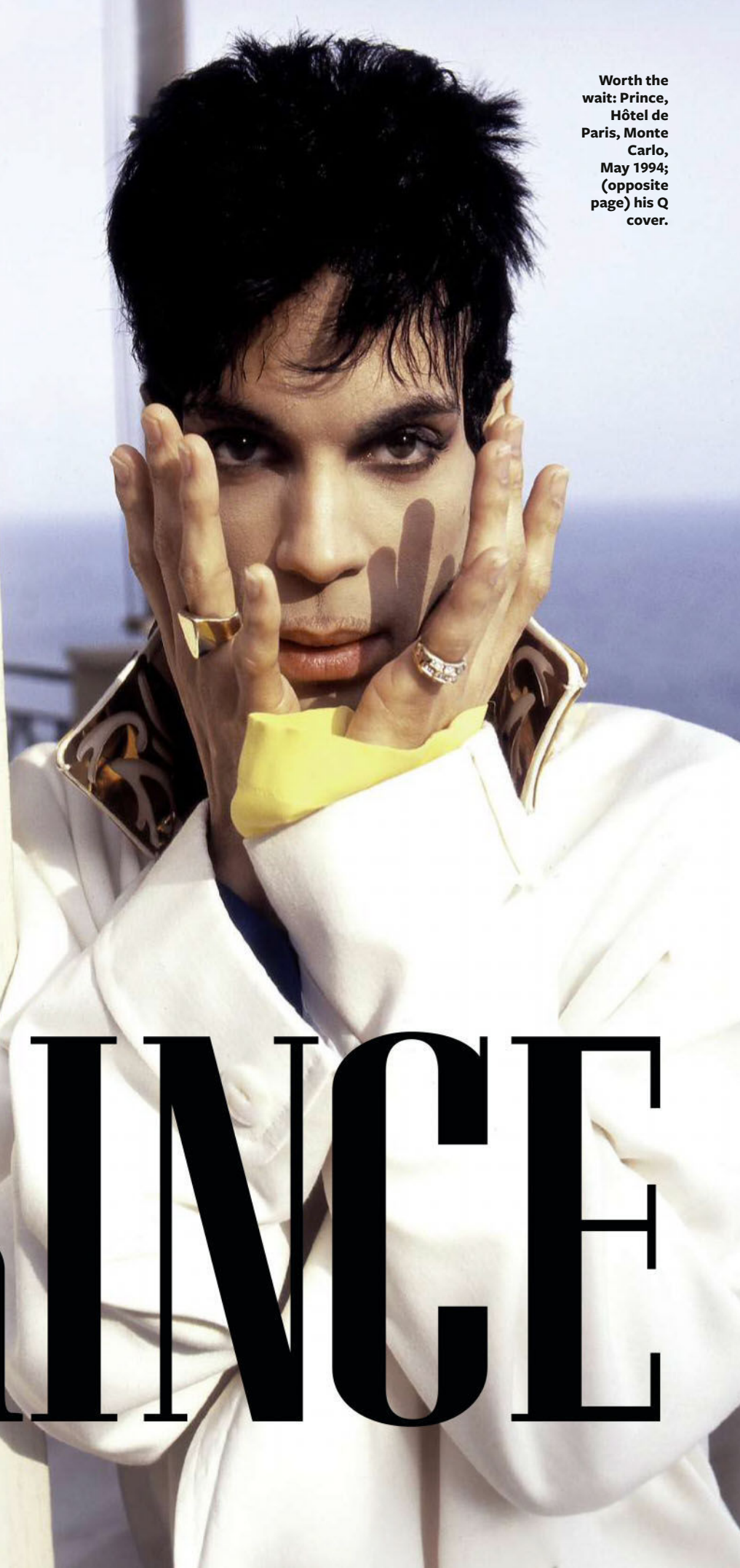
Bigger than that, 1999 transformed Prince into a major star. Like *Thriller*, it was an album so good that it transcended all boundaries. Guns N' Roses bassist Duff McKagan would later describe 1999 as "the greatest album of the '80s". But from Prince, there would be even better to come.

When he had arrived in London in 1981, all that hype about Prince being the successor to Michael Jackson seemed scarcely credible. With 1999, everything changed. "On 1999," said Rolling Stone, "size counts." And with the following album, Prince was going to get even bigger... 

PRINCE
1958 ♀ 2016

Worth the
wait: Prince,
Hôtel de
Paris, Monte
Carlo,
May 1994;
(opposite
page) his Q
cover.

My Date With PRINCE





After years of asking, Q's **Adrian Deevo** (left) was granted a rare interview with Prince in 1994. Only one problem: he wasn't allowed to ask any questions. Somehow he emerged from the star's hotel suite with a classic Q feature, re-printed here alongside Deevo's memories of a strange waiting game.

Prince never enjoyed interviews. He described them as "that big Q followed by that big A, followed by line after line of me either defending myself or cleaning up stories that people have told about me." "If I need psychological evaluation," he added, "I'll do it myself." So it was a surprise when, after almost a decade of asking, Prince agreed to be interviewed by Q in Monaco in spring, 1994. Less surprising were the control freak caveats: no recording equipment, no notes, no personal stuff – and the clincher – no questions! In the end we were agreeing to anything just to sit down with the man who had recently decided to go by the name of ♀. So began a five-day wait in the cloyingly posh principality, impatiently pacing the Formula 1 circuit, until Prince felt the moment was right to talk.

You saw him around the Hôtel de Paris: a glimpse as the lift doors closed, a shadow flitting between the colonnades. He would occasionally ghost up beside you, then vanish. Even Prince's friends said he had an unnerving habit of appearing at your shoulder, saying nothing then slipping away.

A revealing scene occurred one evening when a swarm of fans were chanting his name outside the hotel. Prince materialised in the lobby dressed in a suit made of golden lace, holding a glass walking cane. "Shall I go out the front?" he asked.


Encouraged by his band, The New Power Generation, and accompanied by his soon-to-be wife Mayte Garcia, he strolled out through the main entrance to an extraordinary reaction. Legendary Q photographer Andy Earl went ahead of him and framed a memorable shot of Prince grinning like a fool while his colleagues cracked up laughing.

When Prince eventually decided to speak to me, it was in typically dramatic fashion: well after midnight, on a presidential bed in a five-star suite, the Monte Carlo Casino beneath our balcony, the ocean sighing behind us. It was all rather romantic.

He asked if I liked his new song *The Most Beautiful Girl In The World*. I told him that the lyrics could have come from the goose quill of Shakespeare himself. That seemed to go down well (20 years later, I stand by this). Then we began discussing music – Funkadelic, Hendrix, Elvis, Public Enemy, the blues, jazz, even Mick Hucknall – and suddenly you couldn't shut him up. Two hours later, he was still talking, pacing the room, bouncing on the bed with childlike excitement.

After a few hours, we had set the musical world to rights and Prince had got his convoluted point about artistic freedom across. We all went to bed happy.

The following day, we agreed to meet at 5pm on the hotel roof for the cover shoot. Five minutes past six, Prince pitched up. Andy went over to say hello, tripped over a cable and smashed his lights, resulting in broken glass everywhere and prompting Prince to memorably mutter, "Fuck's goin' on here?"

The session lasted three minutes in which we got 13 shots, one of Q's most dramatic cover shots and a fascinating portrait of one of this lifetime's great artists on a creative crest. 

July 1994...

HIS NAME IS *NOT* PRINCE.

And he is not funky. His name is Albert. And he is lurching across the dancefloor in search of accommodating company. Slightly balding and chunkier than he looks in photographs, he moors behind a gyrating female and clumsily interfaces.

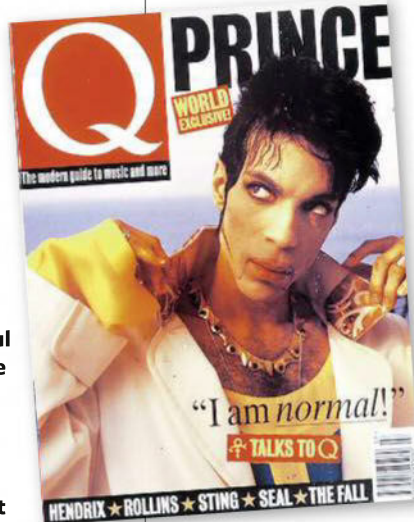
Up on the stage another man whose name is not Prince says, "This is dedicated to Prince Albert, the funkiest man in Monaco." It's a wonder he can get the words out with his tongue buried so deep in his cheek. Prince Albert beams and grinds arrhythmically on. The man on the stage laughs. It's his party and he'll lie if he wants to.

One hundred and twenty people have been invited to the Stars & Bars club in Monte Carlo for this most exclusive of celebrations. The champagne is free, the spirits are freer and the house band is possibly the best live act on the planet. You may remember them as Prince And The New Power Generation. They're still The NPG but he's not Prince any more. He is ♀ (to give him his full title). Sir Hieroglyphicford for short.

Ursula Andress is at the bar, sipping sensually at a flute of champagne. A few generations and a couple of yards along, Claudia Schiffer is doing likewise. It's that sort of a do. Everyone is wearing impossibly shiny shoes and gold epaulettes. Quite what the gnarled jet-setters are making of the music programme is anyone's guess. At 1.15am the Barry Manilow tape was exchanged for a stripped-down five-piece (and non-stop disco dancer Mayte –

pronounced My Tie – Garcia) who have just embarked upon the most daunting funk experience of a lifetime. A knot of maybe 15 perfumed debs cluster around the lip of the stage. Naturally you join them and find yourself standing so close to the Artist Formerly Known As Prince (AFKAP to use the diminutive) that you can hear him singing unamplified behind his microphone.

As the franc-trillionaires dance like your dad or simply stand looking bemused, a set of entirely new material is unleashed. Amazingly, despite performing for over two hours and dancing like an amphetaminated primate, he doesn't break sweat. It's only during the very last song that minute moist tresses begin to glisten at the back of his neck. Shirtless now, you can't help but notice as he cavorts on the floor with Mayte that here is a man who has no truck with underwear. >>



The trained medical eye can also detect, through sheer yellow matador trousers, that he is circumcised. And she isn't. It is indecently, maybe even illegally, sexy. "Doesn't anyone have to go to work tomorrow?" he asks rhetorically as the monied merry-makers bay for another encore. "Guess not."

The Prince camp are an odd crew: all are deeply aware of the idiosyncrasies of their bonsai boss – and they call him "Boss" – but they hold him in unutterably high esteem. One lunchtime, his American PR, face poker-straight, tells me that her charge is "an instrument of God." Amusingly, among the entourage, the P word is rarely mentioned for fear it might result in the P45 word. There is a mild panic when a poster advertising his appearance at Monte Carlo's World Music Awards is spotted with the dread legend on it. In the blink of an eye the name is erased and the now familiar gold unisex symbol drawn in its place. "If he'd seen that," says a relieved minder, "he might have just gone home."

Only once during our five-day stay do we see Prince out of his stage gear. He is in a lift heading down to have his hair re-teased and is wearing a black jumper, leather jeans and impenetrable dark glasses, presumably because he hasn't bothered to put any make-up on. He looks remarkably pale but then he has just got up. It's 5pm.

Similarly, the only time you truly find him off-duty is when you wander early into the empty Stars & Bars club and he is standing on the dancefloor on his own picking out a riff on a bass guitar. After thrumming absently for a while he mutters, "Sounds like shit." Then the enigmatic song-and-dance man looks over to the technicians and says, "Can we get separate EQ for the bass in the monitors?"

Such was the success of the gig at Prince Albert's party, a decision is made to play the same club the following evening. Sadly, the show isn't nearly half as good. It is merely transcendent.

"Do you feel ready to meet him?" asks one of his people. It's been four days now. It's a little after midnight. You're not going to feel much readier. I'm escorted up to a small room that features a large white bed and not much else. The doors are open and, below, the guano-festooned roof of the Monte Carlo Casino looks monumentally unimpressive. The junior suite is the temporary home of Prince's brother and head of security, Duane Nelson. In keeping with the name-change game, he has been rechristened The Former Duane. Prince's personal minder, Tracy, who looks and sounds alarmingly like Mike Tyson, informs us that "he" will be arriving soon.

Within a minute, there is a tiny commotion in the doorway and Prince is suddenly standing before you like a virgin bride on her wedding night. Dressed completely in white silk and wearing full make-up, he only breaks a long floor-bound stare to flash one coquettish glance upwards by way of a greeting. I'm introduced by name. He isn't. We are left alone. An agreement made prior to this meeting stipulated, in no uncertain terms, that three rules were to be obeyed if intercourse of any description were to occur: firstly, that no

tape recorder be used; secondly, that no notepad or pen be brought into the room; and thirdly, and most strangely, that no questions be asked. He wanted to enjoy a half-hour conversation unencumbered by the paraphernalia of nosy journalism.

Prince's Greatest Works: No.4



PURPLE RAIN (1984)
The sound of Prince stamping his imprint onto the decade. With its jaw-dropping solos, effortless melodies (listen to just how stripped-down *When Doves*

Cry actually is behind that front-and-centre vocal) and outré cockiness, here Prince and his band The Revolution indelibly clicked into gear.

"MY SONGS
AREN'T ALL
ABOUT SEX.
PEOPLE READ THAT
INTO THEM."
PRINCE

He paces around the cramped boudoir in deliberate, even steps. He wanders out onto the balcony, still having not uttered a word and then comes back in, shutting the doors behind him. He is small but in perfect proportion, like a scale model of an adult. A doll, an Action Mannequin. He sits down next to me on the bed in a semi-lotus position and fixes his gaze on the middle distance, smiling secretly. No one has said anything for a full minute. Then he turns with this curious expression. It's somewhere between the shamed but surly look of someone that has been wrongly reprimanded and the suggestive glare of someone who is about to shag you. Oh no! He leans forward and you can smell him. It's just like his band told me earlier: he smells of flowers, music and innocence. I smell of lager. Eventually, he says this:

"I don't say much."

Oh dear. Silence. Why not?

He shrugs in slow-motion and looks sideways and downwards. It's a sad, apologetic gesture, like he just killed your dog. This will serve as an answer for many of the questions he's initially asked. Once again. Why is that? Why don't you say much?

"You don't need to."

That doesn't bode well for this conversation really, does it?

"Guess not."

A different tack: "Speak to me only with thine eyes." Have you heard that phrase?

"Mm."

He turns on the bed and laughs, rolling his eyes to heaven. He is wearing an extraordinary amount of slap – foundation, eyeliner, black mascara, brown eyeshadow on the outermost corners of his lids. He has

the most slender line of facial hair that runs from one temple, down his cheek across his upper lip and up the other side. We look at each other for a while. It isn't quite uncomfortable, more exhilarating, like a first date. In keeping with this, I say: "You look lovely, by the way."

He exhales almost sexually, bites his lower lip and whispers, "Why, thank you."

This is becoming ludicrous. We've got 30 minutes and 10 of those have just been swallowed up with nothing more than a handful of sighs, some peculiar body language and one dodgy chat-up

line to show for it. I decide to forget the rules and fire a volley of questions at him.

How did you feel when you heard Jimi Hendrix for the first time? He arranges his hands in a steeple in front of his mouth.

"That was before Puerto Rico," he says quietly and, to be honest, mystifyingly. "I can't remember much before then. That was before I changed my name."

Why have you changed your name?

I acted on the advice of my spirit.

Do you normally do that. Is it reliable, your spirit's advice?

Of course.

Is it significant that you've changed your name?

It's very significant.

Did you dream last night?

Can't remember. Although I had a dream recently and I was telling Mo Ostin [then president of Warner Bros Records, with whom Prince was having a contractual dispute at this time] to be all a man and not half a man.

Do you fall in love easily?

No.

You're a slow burner then?

Uh-huh.



Monaco Grand Spree: Prince creates havoc by stepping out of his hotel (below); (above) with The New Power Generation – including future wife Mayte Garcia – Monte Carlo, 1994.



It isn't going tremendously well. Knocking it on the head and suggesting we just go out for a curry begins to seem like an excellent idea. Then something highly bizarre happens: a sound starts to crackle through a previously unnoticed and inert TV. Without missing a beat, he nods towards the set and says, "It's a sign. It's a sign that we should go to my room." He makes for the door, leading with his shoulders. Duane appears in the hall and asks what the problem is. "A sound came through the TV," explains Prince. "It's a sign." "Nah," says Duane, "you probably just sat on the remote control." And with that, he ushers us back into the bedroom to continue our "conversation".

Do you think you're underrated as a lyricist?

Well, underrated by who? Against what? You know? Some people get them. That's what counts.

Do people not get the humour in your work?

Maybe, but there's a lot of things that I don't get the humour in.

What's the most moving piece of music you've heard recently?

[Long, sigh-strewn pause] Sonny's bass solo last night.

What is your preoccupation with sex all about? It features in nearly all your songs. Does sex really loom that large in your life?

My songs aren't all about sex. People read that into them.

But sex is such a dominant theme. Your new song called Come is unarguably about orgasm.

Is it? That's your interpretation? Come where? Come for what?

Oh, come on!

[Laughs] That's just the way you see it. It's in your mind.

This is the first subject he warms to: different perceptions. When I ask how he thinks other people perceive him, it touches a nerve. In the

Prince's Greatest Works: No 5



PARADE (1986)

Prince's second film *Under The Cherry Moon* was a critically-panned flop but its soundtrack fared better. *Parade* employed a broader musical scope than anything he'd done before, with synth and guitars discarded in favour of wonky baroque-pop orchestrations.

voice of an especially demented mynah bird and asks, "Are you normal? Are you normal? Is that what you're asking me? Do I think I'm normal? Yes, I do. I think I'm normal. I am normal."

What happens in your life when you're not doing music?

[Hikes eyebrows, looks incredulous] When I'm not doing music?

Do you have a life outside of your work?

Yes.

And what does that involve?

[Pinteresque pause] I'm a very private person.

I'm not prying, I'm just interested.

I know. I understand.

The subject of his recording contract with Warner Brothers comes up, as does the topic of Prince's work – he speaks about Prince in the third person. Whether or not Prince the recording artist is finished, consigned to the bunker of history, is unclear. He says several times that the body of work is complete but later admits that he hasn't ruled out the possibility of adding to it, under the name Prince or otherwise, in the future.

Is it possible to shed an entire personality?

It's not like it's a real personality.

It's a person then?

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Yeah, I think it is.

Have you turned your back on pop music?

What's pop music? It's different things to different people.

Beatles-derived four-chord tunes everyone can sing along to.

Still don't help. Is *The Most Beautiful Girl*... pop music? You can't say.

He mentions George Michael's court case for the first time [*in 1992 Michael embarked on a three-year long struggle to free himself from his record contract with Sony*]. It's a subject he'll return to with astonishing regularity and persistence. At one point, he almost shouts, "Why can't George Michael do what he wants? Why can't he write a ballet if he wants to?" By the end of the rant, and it is a rant, I suggest that he should get in touch with George Michael, as he might find such supportive words encouraging. "Oh," he says breezily, "we speak."

What do you think about when you're playing a guitar solo?

I'm normally just listening.

You look like you're about to cry sometimes.

Really? Mm. Maybe.

You seem at your most relaxed onstage.

I'm pretty happy up there. It's a very natural thing for me.

Offstage you seem to be having a good laugh at us sometimes.

[Laughs].

The categorisation of music is another area which gets his goat. Such as: how many people do you know that have just one type of music in their record collections? You don't get home and think, "I'll listen to some ambient jazz punk," do you? Yet record labels feel the need to compartmentalise everything. And he goes on about when you play a song live and it's a jam and you think up some little vocal line and everyone is still singing that when you've left that stage. That's marketing, he says. Wouldn't it be great if someone made an album and gave it away for free? Like air.

Do you ever have a problem translating the sounds you hear in your ear into music?

No, that's never been a problem. The problem is getting it all out before another idea comes along.

Do you exhaust people?

[Laughs] Yes, I do.

A joke: you used to be called Prince and then you were Victor. Why not just call yourself Vince?

I read that somewhere. I was never called Victor. That was the line in the song, "I will be called Victor," I never called myself Victor.

He launches into a monologue about names. What they mean. He has, he says, a friend called Gilbert Davidson, and one day he said to Gilbert, "Who is David? Your father?" "No," said Gilbert. "Is he your grandfather?" "No." "Then you'd better find out who he is." Then Prince



Having his collar felt...
Prince: "If you're shackled and restricted, it doesn't matter how much money you got."

started thinking, "My name is Nelson. Who was Nel? My mother?" Then he thought, "Maybe she's someone that I don't want to know about."

I asked the band, individually, what you smell of?

What I smell of? What'd Sonny [*Thompson, bassist*] say?

He said you smell of music.

[*Delighted smile*] That's a good answer, Sonny.

And I asked them to sum you up in one word. The word one of them chose was, "Wow!"

[Laughs] Who said that? No, let me guess. Was it Michael [*Bland, drummer*]?

Yes.

That's funny. We don't normally talk about that kind of stuff.

Now he's getting excited. He has moved to a chair and is sitting with his boots up on the counterpane. At one point, while agreeing about something with particular enthusiasm, I grab hold of his boot. He doesn't flinch, but his toes wriggle inside. He has left behind the cautious customer of yesteryear and is freewheeling through the thoughts as they enter his head. Suddenly it strikes you. Blimey! It's

"THE PROBLEM FOR ME IS GETTING IT ALL OUT BEFORE ANOTHER IDEA COMES ALONG." PRINCE

By royal appointment:
Prince plays for Prince
Albert of Monaco,
Monte Carlo, 1994.

Prince's Greatest Works: No.6



SIGN O' THE TIMES (1987)

Having discarded *The Revolution*, Prince retreated to the studio and emerged with a double-disc that was his *White Album* to *Purple Rain*'s *Revolver*. The funk sound that had brought

such reward was now mixed with intimate electronic minimalism (*It, The Ballad Of Dorothy Parker*) and more straight-ahead rock anthems (*I Could Never Take The Place Of Your Man*).

just like having a chat with a normal bloke.

Tell me about the opera you've written.

I don't want to give too much away. It's just a story.

What sort of story? A love story?

Could be.

Did you write the libretto?

Yeah [*he laughs at the pretentiousness of the word*], I wrote the story.

Did you find opera difficult to get into?

I don't really listen to opera.

He had spoken to Plácido Domingo earlier in the evening. "He said some very beautiful things and you could sense that he had a feeling of all the power that was in the room and what it could achieve if we did something with it." While they were talking, Prince got this tune in his head that he's going to get down pretty quickly.

I've been told you're "an instrument of God". Stuff's been written about that. Who said that?

Your PR.

[Laughs] Really?

Do you seriously feel like you are a conduit for a higher power?

No, I just practise a lot.

Do you ever feel a telepathy exists between you and The NPG?

Sure, musically, that happens sometimes. But we rehearse too.

He tells a story about making the video for *The Most Beautiful Girl In The World*. They placed ads and got shedloads of letters and home videos back. They selected a cross section of women from different backgrounds and invited them to meet Prince. He asked them what their dreams were and then, to the best of his mortal abilities, set about making those dreams come true. They filmed the women watching footage of their fantasies. One of the women wrote to him afterwards saying that although she was overweight, he'd made her feel beautiful and she would lose weight with the intention of modelling one day.

Is physical beauty an overrated virtue?

Yes. See, you understand.

Did you sit on *The Most Beautiful Girl In The World* so Warners couldn't have it and you could release it on your own terms?

No, I didn't sit on it. I heard that I did that but I only wrote it recently.

What would you have done if it had stiffed?

If it had stiffed? [*Laughs*] It wouldn't have mattered. I put the record out, that was the important thing. People got to hear it.

Did you feel vindicated when it was so successful?

Well, it's nice when people appreciate what you do.

We discuss the future again. He says, "That's why I wanted you to help me because you think that anything is possible." He peels off at a tangent. "In the future," he announces, "I might be interactive. You might be able to access me and tell me what to play." It's certainly a thought. He says he's found a young drummer "who plays things you can't even think. And if he wants to do an album of drum solos, then I'm prepared to go out on tour to finance that."

He brings up Nelson Mandela and the current situation in Mandela's homeland. Mr Mandela, as he calls him, must have had a very clear vision of what would happen. He envies this and would like to have that gift. "Look at South Africa," he

says, palms upturned. "Bosnia. You can't tell people what to do for that long." If he appears to be equating racial and artistic freedom, then surely he has to be prepared to put up with that Mick Hucknall jazz harmonica LP, which, under these terms, could easily emerge? "But would that be a bad thing?" he asks, his argument crumbling. "OK," he concedes, giggling. "I guess you wouldn't have to listen to everything."

Won't people say, "It's all very well Prince banging on about artistic freedom when we've got bills to pay and mundane reality to cope with?" Aren't you speaking from a privileged position?

If you're shackled and restricted, it doesn't matter how much money you got. Money don't help. And I've got bills to pay. People at Paisley [Park], they're like my family, I have responsibility towards them.

Would you like to have children?

That's something I haven't thought about.

You've been thinking about the future so much and you haven't considered children?

No, but I'd like to contribute to the future generation.

He's tearing up and down the room now, having talked for almost an hour and a half. His voice has become excited and slipped up a key. Not quite Kiss standards but getting there. Now and then, he slips into black slang. He even belches once, very gently but it's a belch nonetheless. It's like the Queen farting and lighting it. He enthuses about his new songs, *Now and Days Of Wild*. "What the fuck is that all about?" he asks, shimmying around the bed with one arm stiff behind his back, rapping the opening lines, which involve copious use of the Oedipal compound noun. He speaks about purity in music: "Rock'n'roll was so much better when people were hungry. It was better when you didn't automatically make money. When James [Brown] was putting out an album every four months, that was the stuff."

It's getting on for 2am now and we have one final bash at distilling what he really wants to convey. Before that, he asks about magazine editorial practice and is stimulated by the fact that an article can go from writer to reader virtually untampered with. He speculates about producing music that you would listen to as you read this article. "That would be great, wouldn't it? And although I am an artist without a contract, that's just the sort of thing I can't do."

He recaps one last time: artistic freedom for everyone with fearlessness and limitlessness well to the fore; love and care to be liberally distributed and accepted; peace to reign; dolphins to leap; choirs of children to sing and, um, George Michael to write that ballet.

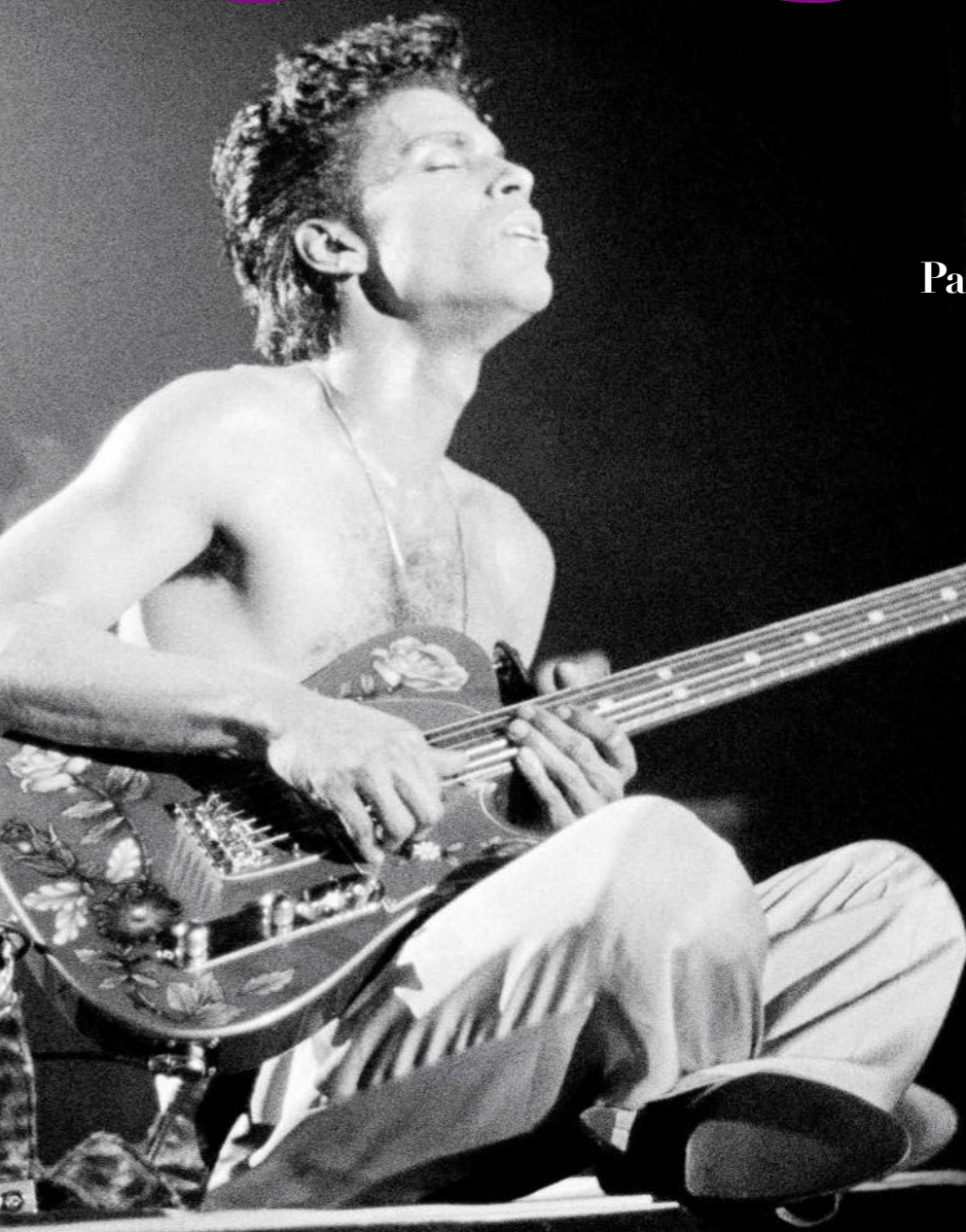
"So," he says spinning on his spangly heels. "Are we gonna party?" He dances towards the door, flicks a final seductive glance over his shoulder and sashays out. Funny little fucker. □

The Purp



Let's go crazy: Prince at his peak, Wembley Arena, London, 1986.

le Reign



Purple Rain, Around
The World In A Day,
Parade, Sign O' The Times,
Lovesexy: **Tom Doyle**
delves deep into Prince's
imperial period.

After years of false hopes and commercial stutters, by 1985 Prince was the huge star he always imagined he would be. Suddenly up there, sharing the same rarefied air as Michael Jackson and Madonna, he reacted in a number of ways. First of all, incredibly, he announced he was quitting touring. Asked by manager Steve Fargnoli about his future plans if they didn't involve live performance, the singer cryptically stated, "I'm going to look for the ladder."

With success, Prince seemed to be buying into his own burgeoning legend and becoming the archetypal enigmatic rock star. As he embarked upon what would become his imperial phase – at least in creative terms – he even began distancing himself from those closest to him.

"There was something shifting in Prince and he started isolating," said Susannah Melvoin, twin sister of The Revolution's guitarist Wendy, and the singer's girlfriend at the time, in a 2013 interview with this

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writer. "We couldn't figure it out, 'What is going on with him? He's becoming less... relaxed.' He was getting very choreographed. He can't be out in the hallways [*backstage*] not dressed fully. At a certain point, the genie was out of the bottle."

Likely believing that in order to achieve greatness he would have to leave behind the everyday, Prince enjoyed his first great artistic leap. Always an unpredictable creative force, he chose to follow up the commercial peak of 1984's *Purple Rain* soundtrack with *Around The World In A Day*, an album which melded '60s psychedelia with his wonky beatbox sounds and individualistic approach to classic rock. From the warped Strawberry Fields Forever flute effects of Paisley Park to the Sgt Pepper-harking cover art, it appeared to be his homage to The Beatles.

But, breaking his three-year interview silence to *Rolling Stone* in autumn 1985, Prince denied this. "The influence wasn't The Beatles," he insisted. "They were great for what they did, but I don't know how that would hang today." Deaf to contemporary sounds, Prince admitted that his chief influences were those artists who had chosen to plough a singular furrow – his favourite records at the time being the sonic adventurism of Joni Mitchell's *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* and Stevie Wonder's *Journey Through "The Secret Life Of Plants"*.

Simultaneously, he tried to play down his image as a true rock star eccentric. "What a lot of people get wrong about this record is I'm not trying to be this great visionary wizard," he said. "I was trying to say something about looking inside oneself to find perfection. We may never reach that but it's better to strive than not."

This constant striving for perfection would come to define Prince throughout the latter half of the '80s. At the same time, the fact that he was no longer making relatively straightforward rock or R&B records caused his first commercial slump. *Around The World In A Day* reached Number 1 in the US chart, but the singles pulled from it yielded diminishing returns. The sunshiny psych-pop perving of *Raspberry Beret* made Number 2, but the vague socio-political finger-wagging of *America* struggled to Number 46.

Undaunted, Prince launched into the making of what many consider his finest album, *Parade*. An idiosyncratic pop symphony, it incorporated jazz and orchestral arrangements, alongside more quirky traits such as the steel drum powering *New Position* or the peculiar synth guitar sound in *Girls & Boys* that sounded like a honking duck. Strangest of all, perhaps, was the alien machine funk of *Kiss*, which came over like a stripped-down electro James Brown. It sounded like no other record made before (or since) and vindicated its creator when in February 1986 it became his third US Number 1.

Of course, Prince quickly went back on his decision to retire from live performance and in August 1986 returned to the UK for his first shows in five years. The *Parade* tour was spectacular. For its teasing opener, Prince And The Revolution were hidden behind a curtain as they started into the song *Around The World In A Day*. Production designer LeRoy Bennett remembers, "The intention was that you could hear him but you couldn't see him. It would drive the crowd nuts." Then, the curtain tumbled to reveal the singer, throwing tambourines out to the crowd and doing scissor kicks off the drum riser in his high heels. "It would send the audience into outer space," says Bennett.

Ever-cocky, Prince began to be mischievously playful with his fellow artists. Joined onstage at Wembley Arena in London by Ronnie Wood on guitar and Sting on bass for an encore cover of The Rolling Stones' *Miss You*, he was devilishly funny, surprise-



"I WAS TRYING TO SAY
SOMETHING ABOUT
LOOKING INSIDE
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halting his well-drilled band at one point to shout out, "Bass solo!" Sting instantly floundered. "He loved fucking with Sting," says Bennett. "Eventually Sting just gave up playing... took his hands off his bass and put them up in the air."

Behind the scenes, though, there was growing discontent within the ranks of The Revolution. Mirroring the tough band-leading, musician-fining James Brown, Prince docked Wendy Melvoin's wages when he caught her drinking a beer backstage, a no-no within the strict regime. "Wendy and Lisa nearly quit before the tour," admits Susannah Melvoin. "They were just like, 'This is getting rough. We don't want to be part of that any more.' Everybody in the band had their day of being the focus of his aggravation."

Prince's black moods may have in part been down to the poor critical and commercial reaction to his second film, *Under The Cherry Moon*, released that summer. A black-and-white, '30s-flavoured affair, shot in the South of France and involving a flimsy premise where the singer cast himself as an irresistible gigolo, it was viewed as a disastrously wrongheaded move after his relatively well-received cinematic debut *Purple Rain*.

Then, Prince's frustrations boiled over in public. Onstage at

Yokohama Stadium in Japan, on the last date of the *Parade* tour on 9 September, 1986, he smashed up his guitar at the end of the show. It was the end of The Revolution. At the same time, he and Susannah Melvoin split, with her returning to Los Angeles from Minneapolis.

"He came chasing me," she says. "He wanted me back so bad out there. I just said, 'I can't do it any more... no.'"

In the aftermath, Prince threw himself deeper into his music. Super-productive, he began filling the tape vaults, resulting in a series of "lost" albums: *Dream Factory*, *Roadhouse Garden*, *Camille*. In reality, most

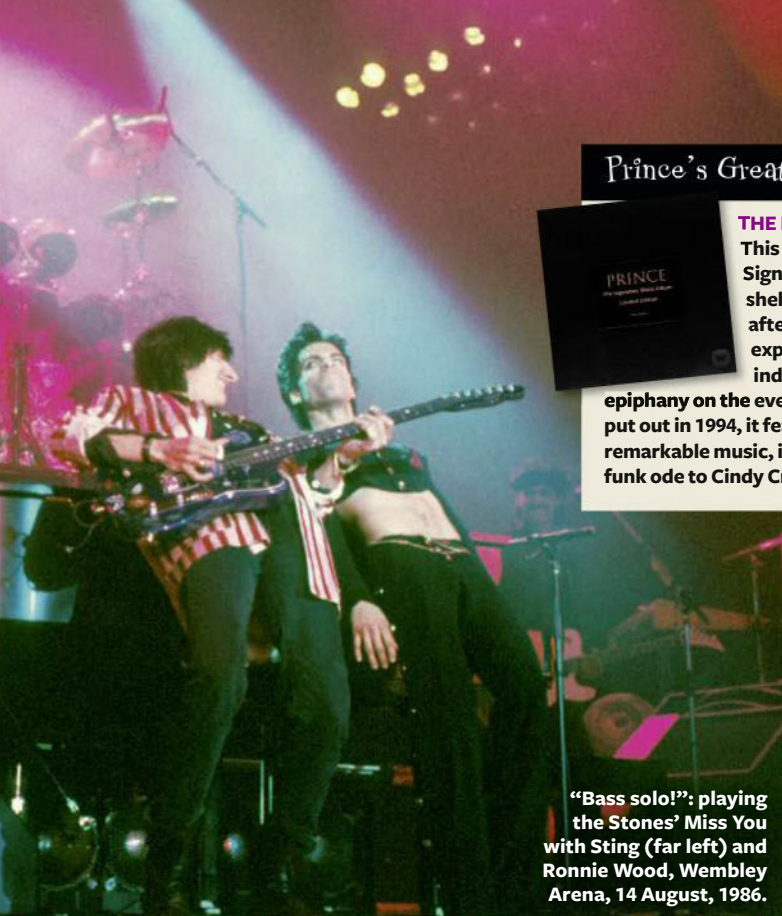
Prince's Greatest Works: *No. 7*



LOVESEXY (1988)

By the late '80s, the pouty braggadocio of his earlier records gave way to a new introspective and religion-focused Prince. "That's when I called His name/

Don't U know He found me?" he sings in enlightened tones on *Lovesexy* opener *Eye No*. Musically, it's a sumptuous update on the disco rhythms of his breakthrough LPs.



Prince's Greatest Works: No.8



THE BLACK ALBUM (1994)
This quickfire follow-up to *Sign O' The Times* was shelved for seven years after Prince reportedly experienced an ecstasy-induced religious epiphany on the eve of release. Officially put out in 1994, it features some remarkable music, in particular the lusty funk ode to Cindy Crawford, *Cindy C*.

"Bass solo!": playing the Stones' Miss You with Sting (far left) and Ronnie Wood, Wembley Arena, 14 August, 1986.

of these were unfinished works-in-progress leading to what was intended to be his next release, the triple album *Crystal Ball*.

When the singer presented this sprawling album to Warner Brothers though, they rejected it, fearing it would overwhelm the market. Prince turned huffy and the first rift was created between artist and label. "I don't think it's their place to talk me into or out of things," he said. Instead, the singer was forced to cut *Crystal Ball* down to a double album, renaming it *Sign O' The Times* after the stirring title track which saw him update the '70s social conscience soul of Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye for the '80s, while rapping over haunted, sparse electronics.

At this point, though, Prince seemed to turn his back on the US market, nixing American tour plans, while focusing on Europe, where his strange new music – not least the gender-blurring *If I Was Your Girlfriend* – was better understood. Rotterdam and Antwerp were the locations for the filming of his *Sign O' The Times* concert movie in summer 1987, although Prince was unhappy with the rushes, re-filming most of the performances back home in Minnesota.

Those surrounding Prince noted that he seemed to be turning more intense as he approached what was intended to be his next LP: working title, *The Funk Bible*. "For the first time," said saxophonist Eric Leeds, "he appeared truly obsessed, as if he had something to prove."

This new music was groove-driven, but dark. In *Dead On It*, Prince took a pop at the "tone deaf" rappers he apparently felt threatened by

that was reflected in that album. I realised that we can die at any moment and we'd be judged by the last thing we left behind. I didn't want that angry, bitter thing to be my last thing."


Prince immediately killed the release of what was to subsequently become known as *The Black Album*. In the pre-internet age, it proved to be the most famous bootleg since Bob Dylan's *The Great White Wonder* in 1969, distributed via hissy cassettes at record fairs.

The next Prince album, the spiritually-enhanced *Lovesexy* in 1988, was a joyously upbeat offering that let the light back in after the darkness of *The Black Album*. Loosely a concept album, its title was decoded as being an oblique reference to God, who does battle with the devil-like "Spooky Electric". Significantly, Prince's opening words on the record denounced drug-taking. "Welcome to the new power generation," he coolly intoned. "The reason why my voice is so clear is there's no smack in my brain."

In support of *Lovesexy*, Prince turned in a series of shows which are still regarded as his greatest. Performing in-the-round on a circular stage, the singer arriving onstage in a white Thunderbird car, it was a dazzling but provocative production. His new dancer/rapper protégée Cat Glover simulated fellatio on the singer in *Head*, before the pair writhed together on a bed. During preaching ballad *Anna Stesia*, where the star's internal sex and God conflict seemed to reach a peak, he played a keyboard as he rose high into the air on a hydraulic column. In a second act solo section at the piano, Prince's arch bragging revealed itself once again, as he suddenly jolted back from the keys, as if having suffered an electric shock. "Sometimes," he grinned, "I scare myself."

This boldness was to backfire, however, when it came to the cover of *Lovesexy*, which depicted a naked Prince – knee carefully raised to hide his genitals – perched on an oversized orchid. Deemed offensive, it was banned by many US retail chains including Walmart, causing the album to stall at Number 11 in the US. *Lovesexy* would go on to sell nearly two million copies worldwide, but it was a low point on the singer's downward commercial curve. Only four years before, *Purple Rain* had clocked up 13 million sales in the States alone.

In 1988 Prince's Paisley Park complex in the Minneapolis suburb of Chanhassen was completed. It was to here that the star retreated from public view, becoming part Howard Hughes, part Willy Wonka. A \$10 million creative playground, comprising recording studios, a film soundstage and design department (where 10 wardrobe staffers were employed to work full-time on costumes), the daily costs of running Paisley Park quickly began to deplete his dwindling income.

To help balance the books, Prince wrote the soundtrack for Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* movie, earning him a much-needed \$1million. As a record, it had its moments, but something was lost and somehow never quite regained. From here on in, marooned from reality, Prince would struggle to reignite his creative spark. 



Boa selecta!: (above) live in California, 1985; (below) a premiere showing of Prince's cinematic turkey, *Under The Cherry Moon*, Wyoming, July 1986.



A Brief Encounter With The Artist Formerly Known As...

Sylvia Patterson remembers a 30-minute meeting with Prince at Paisley Park.

As the footage flashed across rolling news coverage that surreal evening of 21 April, four months into this year's Celebrity Death Apocalypse, the music was one thing, we were all talking about the music, but, man (went the second thought)... *look at those clothes!*

Here was ecstatic funk-pop's greatest-ever wardrobe on staggering display – feathers, satins and velvets, hats, glitter and heels – reminding us not only of the thrill of the peacock pompadour but a core component of the nature of rock'n'roll itself: *audacity*. How could someone this alive be dead? Not *him*. Not the one who embodied unknowable enigma, androgynous glamour, musical autonomy, singular madness and the pop star as fantastical myth. Suddenly, it was like the violet strip was snuffed right out of the rainbow.

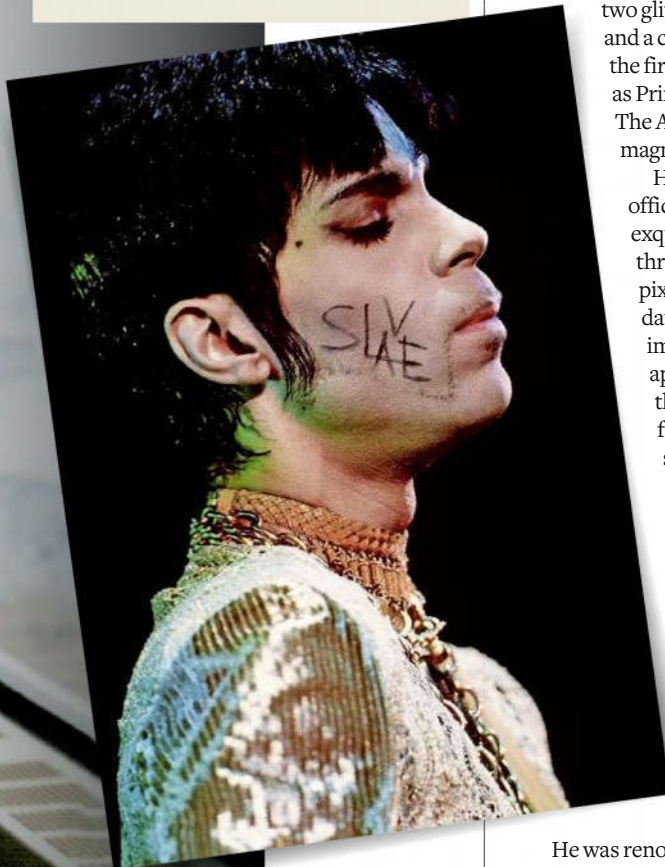


Prince's Greatest Works: No.9



THE GOLD EXPERIENCE (1995)

Prince's musical output in the '90s was overshadowed by a lengthy dispute with his record label. Matching the sinister lyrical themes of *The Black Album* with funk-rock riffs that recalled his classic records, this was the highlight of the era he described as "the friction years". Number One hit *The Most Beautiful Girl In The World* showed he still wanted to be a star.



"He was, surely, the most fabulous punk who ever lived." (left) Prince in 1996; (above) Cheeky! Having a pop at Warners in 1995.

HOW COULD
SOMEONE
THIS ALIVE
BE DEAD?

TORONTO STAR/GETTY, REX

Mere months after Bowie, another electrified kink was straightened out, disastrously, in the space-time continuum which dazzles brightest at the edges, where it curves. He was, surely, the most fabulous punk who ever lived. He didn't call his band *The Revolution* for nothing.

Not many journalists were ever privy to Prince's hermetically-sealed existence, despite his unexpected, recent-years interview flurry. Back in the '80s and '90s we'd be more likely to meet a unicorn, until he announced in '96 his first-ever global press conference, a hundred foamingly-excited Prince fanatics summoned to the Paisley Park complex we're now balefully familiar with as a ghostly, grey shrine. That day he talked to a handful of us, for a full 30 minutes each and his eyes, today, are immortally seared into my still-disbelieving psyche as two glittering planet-sized orbs of Bambi-esque kindness and a curious inner mirth. "Do you like my house?" was the first thing he said, the year he was no longer known as Prince, but either  (an unpronounceable symbol) or The Artist Formerly Known As Prince, as only the magnificently unhinged could get away with.

He emanated serenity, calmly seated in a functional office, a glass conference table between us, dressed exquisitely in a fawn cashmere overcoat, a tight mauve three-piece suit, skinny mauve tie and matching mauve pixie boots. With slicked-back, blackest hair, he'd daubed glitter behind his ears. Maybe it's the power of imagination, or willing projection, but this human apparition was *definitely glowing purple*. He was there that day to talk about freedom, a lifelong creative freedom fighter newly sprung from the contractual straight-jacket of his Warner Brothers "slave" years. He veered towards the mystical, declaring he was no longer "conforming to anything, except the universe", a man no longer possessed of his sometime "massive ego" born out of "insecurities", declaring "a great mistake is to see yourself as superior to anyone else". Soon, this none-more-high-camp, sexually voracious visionary was advocating self-control, monogamy and sobriety, which didn't seem very funky.

"I think it is," he glimmered. "See, it's all about paths. Drugs, sex, alcohol – all those experiences can be *very* funky, but they're just a diversion, not the answer."

He was renouncing, it seemed, everything he'd once been, a man who'd built his then-20-year career on the sexual permissiveness of a world-class crumpeteer. Comedy capers ensued. But this would never do (I opined), you're The Purple Perv, The Valentino of Pop, the Errol Flynn of Funk!


"Heheheh!" he cackled, "that may be so."

Too right it's true! You're the man who once said, "I never waste an erection."

"Oh boy," he chirped, with an enormous smile. "That's right, I said, 'I hate to see an erection go to waste.' Well, I've as much sexual energy as ever, I just find other things sexy these days."

All that brash, delicate, soaring, sensual, profound, prophetic and infinitely funkalicious music, meanwhile, which made the whole world dance for decades, was nothing to do with him.

"It wasn't me," he beamed. "It was a gift to me from the higher powers."

During the mid-'90s I saw Prince play a "secret show" at London's long-gone Astoria, arriving onstage at 2am and playing 'til dawn, boogie-ing in his purple satins alongside Chaka Khan and George Benson, with the energy of the seemingly immortal. And now, of course, he *is*, this uniquely inspirational, one-man musical parade who turned our often-troubling planet into a euphoric purple party. Rest easy, your highness, in outer-space – where you belong. 

PRINCE
1958 ♀ 2016



Back Into The Limelight

By the start of the 21st century, Prince was dangerously close to slipping into irrelevance. However, by embracing his past and staging spectacular shows he reminded the world of his genius.

New power generation: (left) playing London's Shepherd's Bush Empire, 2014; (right) with backing band 3rdEyeGirl, 2014.



**YOU KNEW
YOU WERE
GOING TO
SEE THE
GREATEST
ENTERTAINER
ON EARTH
DELIVERING
THE GOODS.**

Around the turn of the millennium, the public perception of Prince – to the extent that anyone gave him much thought at all – was that of an out-of-touch, technophobic relic whose only real contact with the outside world came when he ventured out on door-knocking sprees on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses. All of which contained more than a grain of truth. It wasn't that Prince had stopped making valid and interesting music. The piano-based *One Nite Alone...* in 2002 and the following year's instrumental *Xpectation* certainly had their charms, but his decade-long sulk with the industry meant that he'd lost the means, or even the inclination, to bring his music to the ears of the wider public beyond his hardcore fanbase.

The first sign that something was changing came in 2004 when he released the solid, if unspectacular *Musicology* on a major label (Columbia) and embarked on a full-scale tour, seen by 1.47 million people, on which he didn't just force audiences to sit through his new record – he played the hits.

Anyone who hadn't been tempted to take a

chance on a ticket saw just what they'd been missing on 7 February, 2007 when Prince played what is widely considered to be the greatest-ever Superbowl half-time show at the Dolphin Stadium in Miami. Kicking off with some hilariously phallic shadowplay, he proceeded to deliver the sort of ruthless, all-killer mini-set the world hadn't seen since Queen at Live Aid. Plus he did it in a Floridian downpour which gave *Purple Rain* the best natural light show he could possibly have wished for. Reportedly, worried organisers asked him beforehand whether he minded playing in the rain. "Can you make it rain harder?" he replied.

This new, crowd-pleasing approach continued into the campaign for the next album, *3121*, when he played a mammoth 21-night run at London's O2 Arena with tickets priced at a punter-tempting £31.21. When the opening chord of *Purple Rain* rang out for the first song of the first night, 20,000 fans looked at each other in disbelief: So, he's going to do *that* show?

For most of the rest of his life, Prince would do that show. The first and only time he headlined a UK festival, at Hop Farm in 2011, he soundchecked and tuned up his band live onstage during the first song, then walked up to the mic, said the words, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to day..." and played another blinding, hits-packed set. Indeed, at what would be his final-ever UK gig, an Autism Rocks concert at London's Koko in February last year, he walked on, announced he was going to play 14 hits in a row, then did exactly that. That's why, when he played his *HITnRUN* shows in the UK in 2014 with all-female trio 3rdEyeGirl, announced at short notice with no advance tickets, the stress and the queuing was worth it. You knew you were going to see the greatest entertainer on Earth, delivering the goods. What's more, at £10 a ticket, it cost less than a tour T-shirt.

Meanwhile, he'd also been steadily stripping away the needless frills from his music. On albums like *Lotusflow3r* and the 3rdEyeGirl-backed album *Plectrumelectrum*, Prince rocked like he hadn't for almost 30 years. He also stopped being coy about his past, and happily threw echoes of his '80s glory years into radio-friendly pop singles like *Rock And Roll Love Affair* and *Screwdriver*.

There were ignominious moments and dubious decisions like giving his albums away for free with the *Mail On Sunday* and the *Mirror*, but the last ten years of his life were studded with enough great tracks – *Black Sweat*, *Guitar*, *Laydown*, and the Janelle Monáe-featuring *Givin' Em What They Love* – to prove that he never truly lost his touch.

Back home in Minneapolis, far from the recluse of popular repute, he'd become more rooted in the community than ever before. He regularly threw the doors of Paisley Park open for huge parties, attending local gigs and even, on the weekend before his death, visited Minneapolis record shop Electric Fetus on Record Store Day.

At the time of his death, his pared-back *Piano & A Microphone* tour, which was sadly fated never to reach the UK, was proving once again to audiences across North America that Prince had well and truly come in from the cold and that nobody on the planet could touch him as a live performer. By this point, if anyone didn't already know how amazing Prince still was, they probably weren't paying attention. Prince's renaissance didn't only restore his own reputation. To anyone who saw him during the last decade, he revitalised their faith in music. *SIMON PRICE*

Prince's Greatest Works: **No.10**



PLECTRUMELECTRUM (2014)
Prince's first album in four years sparked a prolific late-career surge. He released four in the last two years of his life and this was the best.

Recorded with the female trio 3rdEyeGirl, it's a straightforward and lean funk-rock record that reflected the exhilarating punchiness of his HITnRUN live shows.

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119 MANIC STREET PREACHERS

Twenty years on, a reappraisal of the Manics' immortal Everything Must Go album, now in box-set form.



100 HINDS

Joaquin Phoenix joins the queue to see the Spanish garage-rockers live in Los Angeles.



105 CORINNE BAILEY RAE

The Yorkshire singer returns uplifted and optimistic after a six-year absence.

HOW WE REVIEW

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CLASSIC

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EXCELLENT

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satisfaction is guaranteed.

★★★

GOOD

Good within its field, but perhaps not for everyone.

★★

FAIR

For die-hard fans. Even they may be disappointed.

★

POOR

Move along, there's nothing of interest here.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

The Turner and Kane
show arrives in the US.





Get a room! Alex Turner (left) and Miles Kane, Webster Hall, New York, 11 April, 2016.

THE LAST SHADOW PUPPETS

WEBSTER HALL, NEW YORK
MONDAY, 11 APRIL, 2016

★★★★

Shall we start with Aviation or Calm Like You?" It's 15 minutes before The Last Shadow Puppets take to the stage in New York City. Just yards away, a crowd of 1400 are packed into Webster Hall but inside the tiny dressing room above the stage, Miles Kane and Alex Turner have left the setlist until the last possible moment.

Bravely, they opt to give Q the casting vote. Deciding that the duo should lead with something from their newly released second album *Everything You've Come To Expect* (and the fact that it has a cooler-sounding title), we opt for *Aviation*. "Alright, but if anything goes wrong, it's on you," winks Kane.

There's no actual apprehension in his voice, though. The Last Shadow Puppets could start the night with an obscure polka and still have their fans cheer in delirium. The new album has entered the UK chart at Number 1 and excitement is just as high in the city where they launched the band eight years ago. In March 2008, they played their first live shows acoustically, in a now defunct record store in Brooklyn and a tiny Lower East Side club. The latter was punctuated by sound problems and several terse conversations between Turner and the venue's soundman. Just the memory of it is enough to make Turner roll his eyes.

"We were very excitable and we got carried away," he says. "We thought we could do anything. We thought we were like Lennon and McCartney and we had these amazing tunes, which we didn't. It was a bit shit."

"We discovered veins in our necks that night that we didn't know we had," laughs Kane.

Since then, the success of Arctic Monkeys' *AM* has elevated Turner to legitimate rock star status in America, while Kane has come of age with 2011's *Colour Of The Trap* and the 2013 follow-up *Don't Forget Who You Are*. Their debut as a duo, *The Age Of The Understatement*, captured them as boys but now, The Last Shadow Puppets have returned as men. As gig >>

RYAN MUIR



You could have somebody's eye out with that: Kane overshadows in the trouser department.

"WORKING WITH MILES MAKES ME FEEL MORE CONFIDENT ABOUT GOING IN NEW DIRECTIONS." **ALEX TURNER**

time nears, the mood goes from self-assured to celebratory. The pair, their band (consisting of Zachary Dawes on bass, Tyler Parkford on keys, and Loren Humphrey on drums), and their string quartet all gather in a circle, to down a shot of tequila in unison.

Once all has been successfully chugged, Kane puts Jacques Dutronc's 1966 hit *Les Cactus* on the dressing room stereo, straps on his guitar and begins singing along loudly in French, while lunging around in a way that may gain him entry to Monty Python's *Ministry Of Silly Walks*. Turner joins in the revelry by doing his own routine that looks like Tommy Cooper doing jazz hands. It's all faintly absurd.

As they stride on to the stage, Kane and Turner instantly project their interplay outwards. Geeking up the crowd (and each other) like a couple of particularly dapper wrestlers, they kick into the aforementioned *Aviation*. It blooms quickly thanks to Turner's keening riff, which delicately lattices

Kane's crooning of the line, "My mama told me you should start as you mean to go wrong." As openers go, *The Last Shadow Puppets* couldn't have picked a better one themselves.

It isn't long before Kane and Turner

are giving each other bear hugs and chuckling conspiratorially between songs. At points, Turner even bows to Kane as he plays his solos. For every genuine expression of affection, there is also a tongue-in-cheek send-up of their bromance. It's something that becomes especially apparent during a version of *Everything You've Come To Expect's* baroque title track, during which they begin to caress and stroke each other seemingly in an attempt to recreate the sultry ear-fondling of *Style Council's* infamous *Long Hot*



"Hear me roar!": Kane steps out of Turner's shadow.

"You can let go of my hand now...": Alex Turner reaches out to the Big Apple faithful.



Setlist

Aviation

The Age Of The Understatement

Used To Be My Girl

Calm Like You

The Element Of Surprise

Dracula Teeth

She Does The Woods

Miracle Aligner

My Mistakes Were Made For You

Only The Truth

Bad Habits

Pattern

Everything You've Come To Expect

Meeting Place

Sweet Dreams, TN

In My Room

Encore

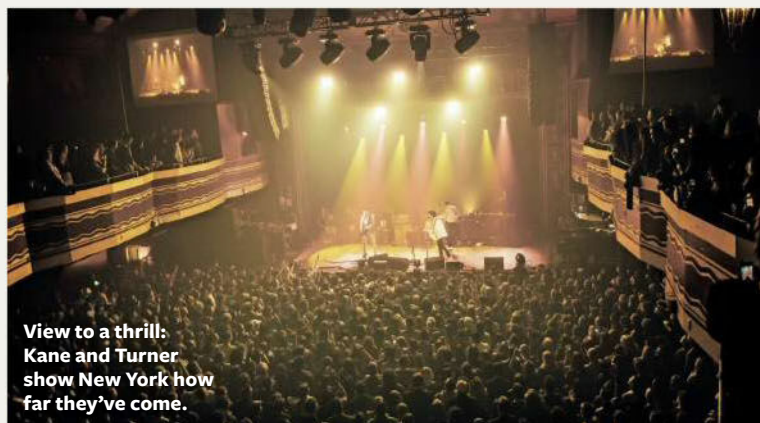
I Want You (She's So Heavy)

The Dream Synopsis

Standing Next To Me

Summer video. Given that the duo have openly cited this track as an influence on their latest batch of songs, it's no accident to see them getting off a wave of pogoing across the room. Meanwhile, The Element Of Surprise employs a newfound funk that sounds like the Rat Pack performing inside George Clinton's Holy Mothership.

But the biggest shift in the band's dynamic comes courtesy of Kane. For so long, the idea of him being second fiddle to the more famous (and, depending on who you ask, more talented) Turner has dominated. But onstage at least, it's Kane who often appears more dominant, as he growls and barks his way through a vicious version of Bad Habits. He also gives She Does The Woods – one of the more middling tracks on the new album – a stirring makeover thanks to



View to a thrill: Kane and Turner show New York how far they've come.

a breakneck instrumental interlude topped off by a dizzying, art-rock solo.

A brief encore sees them meander a little with a slightly indulgent spin on The Beatles' I Want You (She's So Heavy) and the largely forgettable The Dream Synopsis, but the damage has long since been done. The Last Shadow Puppets' return feels not just like a progression, but a mutation.

With the gig done, dusted, and aced, a post-show congregation of friends, industry people, and models of various heights and hairstyles, begins on the balcony. Kane is game, coming out to meet and greet while holding onto his new girlfriend. Turner stays inside the Webster Hall dressing room,

wearing a deeply satisfied smile as he salutes his partner's ability to take him where the Arctic Monkeys sometimes do not.

"Songs like Everything You've Come To Expect go into the more surreal and abstract, but on the other hand, Sweet Dreams, TN is way more direct and personal than anything I've written before," he explains. "Working with Miles makes me feel more confident about going in both of those directions. And when he plays guitar, he makes it sound like it's got about eight strings." For The Last Shadow Puppets, the age of understatement has given way to something way more emphatic. **GEORGINA NEWMAN**

King Charles: Bradley
takes it to the stage,
London, March 2016.

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

The late-blooming soul star testifies in front of a rapt London crowd.



Jacket required: Bradley inspects his stagewear.

CHARLES BRADLEY & HIS EXTRAORDINAIRES

02 FORUM, LONDON
WEDNESDAY, 30 MARCH, 2016

★★★★

A bucketful of red roses sit on a table beside Brooklyn's "Screaming Eagle of Soul", Charles Bradley. It's two hours before stage time at his biggest UK headline show to date, and Bradley's looking sharp, in tight black roll neck sweater, grey jeans and sculpted Afro.

This remarkable 67-year-old has latterly emerged as retro-soul's magnetic new Mr Loverman, in the twilight years of an otherwise bitterly underprivileged life. Much of it he spent beneath the breadline, in supported housing, while by night scratching a meagre fee as a James Brown impersonator.

After his belated rise through New York's Daptone stable, success has not been an unmitigated joy for him. A thoughtful man, whose high-pitched, lispy voice often runs away with him before he's assembled all his words correctly, Bradley can only brood on

the injustice that preceded his fame – specifically, how he was forced to care for his mother, though dirt poor himself, until her passing two years ago.

He is keen, however, to extend his tenure in the limelight. “These bangles here have been my trademark ever since I was a child,” he says, rattling the metalwork on his wrist. “Before, they was, like, steel wire. But this one was for my first album – that’s gold – and this silver one was for the second. So now I really gotta go out there and push this new album.”

Where 2011’s *No Time For Dreaming* majored in lean ghetto-funk, and 2013’s *Victim Of Love* allowed in more orchestral colour, Bradley’s latest, called *Changes*, largely zeroes in on his vocal power across a ballad format. Its title track, a cover of the Black Sabbath smoocher, charts the depth of his maternal loss, and could just be a sizeable left-field hit.

Yet it’s as a performer that Bradley makes his biggest gains. “When I’m onstage,” he says, “I’m in my living room. I can open my heart, and let people know who I am.”

The roses on the table next to him, he explains, are for the ladies of a certain age who flock to the front row at his gigs. “Sometimes I get a little special and sexy up there,” he says, grinning. “I gotta give a little flirtin’, because that’s what they ask me for.”

Come 9.30pm, his latest in a succession of backing bands, the seven-piece *Extraordinaires*, featuring two horn players and “Little” Barrie Cadogan on guitar, arrive to loosen up with some instrumentals. Then the keys player becomes hype man – “I want y’all to scream for Chaaaaarles Braaaadleeey” – and there he is, in a gleaming white suit with a fancy Bolero jacket, and a purple cape over one shoulder.

Midway through opener *Heartaches And Pain*, a song about his life of penury, he’s already on his knees, in a move doubtless perfected across 45 years of “being James Brown”. Inescapably, Bradley’s phrasing has been shaped by those decades of imitative graft, but by *How Long* the audience are experiencing how the Screaming Eagle’s tonsils take wing with a wild, untethered energy all their own. Between verses, Bradley spreads his arms wide and flaps them with a bird of prey’s slow elegance, while emitting a wordless howl – “roooowwwaaaarrgh!” – that would have Brown spinning in his grave for its indiscipline. Likewise, his moves

“SOMETIMES I GET A LITTLE SPECIAL AND SEXY UP THERE.”
CHARLES BRADLEY



Flower power: Bradley adorns the front row with roses.



Taking the meet-and-greet to a new level.

romantic songs are usually in fact about his mother – *In You (I Found A Love)*’s lines about how “you hurt me so bad” most likely refer to how mum Inez abandoned him in Florida when he was just eight months old.

After a heart-wrenchingly impassioned rendition, Bradley’s vulnerability becomes all too visible: he stands for a minute by the drumkit covering his eyes, clearly overcome by emotion. The audience redouble their roar of appreciation; the singer pours a bottle of water over himself, gathers himself and soldiers on.

Returning for his encore, he explains his attachment to *Changes*, and stops before the final verse to dedicate it to “my mum up in heaven”. His grief purged, out come the roses, duly hand-delivered in an umpteenth emotional sortie into the photo pit.

Backstage afterwards, Bradley is pooped. “I’m digging deeper for more love to give,” he splutters, but shrugs helplessly. For now, his bucket is empty. **ANDREW PERRY**

Setlist

Heartaches And Pain

You Think I Don't Know (But I Know)

How Long

Nobody But You

You Put The Flame On It

Intermission
Love Bug Blues

The World (Is Going Up In Flames)

Lovin' You, Baby

In You (I Found A Love)

Ain't It A Sin

Why Is It So Hard?

Changes

during *You Put The Flame On It*: patently unchoreographed, he cups his hands behind his ears, and gives a series of pelvic thrusts that are all the more fabulous for their uncoolness and, frankly, asexuality.

A big part of Bradley’s appeal lies in his total lack of poker-faced machismo. What’s more, among gritty, apocalyptic numbers such as *The World (Is Going Up In Flames)*, his apparently

Leading man: “I’m digging deeper for more love to give...”



"You put your left leg in...": Hinds (from left, Ade Martin, Carlotta Cosials, Ana García Perrote), L.A., April 2016.



ALIVE AND KICKING

Spanish indie-rockers wrap up their US tour with customary ramshackle charm.

HINDS

ECHOPLEX, LOS ANGELES
FRIDAY, 1 APRIL, 2016

★★★★

April Fool's Day in Hollywood and Hinds's Ana García Perrote is stood onstage at LA's Echoplex venue, strumming her guitar with a kazoo. A few minutes into the indie-rock quartet's opening song Warning With The Curling, Perrote takes the kazoo

(which is held together by duct tape) and blows into it. To her right, co-frontwoman Carlotta Cosials smiles from ear-to-ear and "bahs" through the microphone like a trigger-happy lamb.

It's the final night of their sold-out, month-long US tour, and Hinds (aged between 19 and 25) are just about managing to clatter through their two-minute garage-rock rackets, which are held together by communications in broken English. "We come from [a] place called

Madreeeeed in Spain!" shouts Cosials, sipping on a beer can. "Being the last night it's special for us. Maybe not for you. You don't geev a fuck!" Except, they do. Many "fucks" are given.

Later on, A-list star Joaquin Phoenix, comedic actor Will Arnett

"IT'S NOT LIKE THIS IS OUR USUAL SOCIAL LIFE." CARLOTTA COSIALS

and Casey (brother of Ben) Affleck will clamber over young fans at the bar after the set, trying to steal a moment with Hinds, the biggest band to ever make it out of Madrid. "It is not like this is our usual social life," reassures Cosials, puffing on a post-gig cigarette.

You can count the number of crossover acts from Spain on one hand: the Iglecias, Los Del Rio (The Macarena), Las Ketchup (The Ketchup Song) and that's about it. Hinds's career is a happy accident that began four years ago when best friends Perrote and Cosials went on a road trip to the coast of Spain. Instead of a bucket-and-spade, they brought along a guitar they couldn't play. Perrote figured out three chords, taught them to Cosials and the journey began.

Adding bassist Ade Martin and drummer Amber Grimbergen (who they found via Facebook) in 2014 before the release of two-song EP *Demo*, they called themselves Deers, toured with The Vaccines and received early praise from Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie. Not even a name change could derail the increasing buzz (legal action was taken by Canadian band The Dears) as 2015 took in non-stop gigging across the world.

Tonight's show sold out weeks ago, and beforehand you can feel the excitement of fans keen to see their short, sharp bursts of ADHD lo-fi rock, inspired by The Strokes and gap-toothed scuzz-rocker Mac DeMarco. Met by crowd chants of "Viva Hinds! Viva Hinds!", it's hard to know whether you're at a gig, a house party or a Real Madrid match. "Ahahaha! Like a sport show," smiles Cosials, reflecting at the bar.

"Before having the band we were super music lovers, but when we went to gigs we never thought about how the band were on a tour," she laughs.

Setlist

Warning With
The Curling

Trippy Gum

Fat Calmed
Kiddos

Warts

Between Cans

Walking Home

When It
Comes To You

Chili Town

Easy

Bamboo

San Diego

Garden

Castigadas En
El Granero

Solar Gap

Davey
Crockett

It's funny to think that Hinds, who played 16 shows in four days at last year's South By Southwest, never realised that there was such a thing as touring. Their naivety informs the music, too. Tonight, songs such as *Fat Calmed Kiddos*, *Warts* and *Chili Town* are delivered with a brazen youthfulness, containing lyrics that sound inspired by text conversations and lasting about as long as a Snapchat post.

Hinds are intended for consumption by those yet to develop an ounce of cynicism. Beginning with

the band walking out to *You Sexy Thing* by Hot Chocolate, the gig bows out with dozens of fans invading the stage during their cover of Davey Crockett, a song originally by Kent garage-rockers Thee Headcoats. They deliver it with feral femininity as though they're the subjects of The Troggs' *Wild Thing*, if the wild thing was a four-headed inter-railing student who somehow managed to make it across the Atlantic.

Afterwards, Cosials explains the decision to title their album *Leave Me Alone*. "It's our punk position," she says. "Everybody tries to give you advice. People would say: 'A song has to have a chorus.' We say, 'Maybe you're right. But, maybe you're wrong?'"

As Cosials flogs their remaining tour merchandise ahead of a flight home tomorrow ("we have too much luggage: presents, vinyls, knee socks, so many new backpacks!"), she wonders what life will be like when they land. "You know that movie directed by Robert Zemeckis?" She turns to Perrote and asks how to say *Cast Away* in English. "The guy spends four years on a desert island and suddenly he's found and taken back to real life, but he doesn't fit in at all?"

She laughs. Hinds aren't ready to go home ever again. *EVE BARLOW*

"Hinds (Amber Grimbergen, left, and Cosials pictured) are intended for consumption by those yet to develop an ounce of cynicism."

All aboard!: fans invade the stage while Hinds deliver their last song with a "feral femininity".

THIS MONTH

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HIGHER GROUND

North London soul singer's great leap forwards.



MICHAEL KIWANUKA

LOVE & HATE

POLYDOR, OUT 27 MAY

With his 2012 debut *Home*

Again, Michael Kiwanuka seemed to arrive with an in-built filter that gave his songs a rich patina of vintage soul, an integral crackle and hiss of surface noise that suggested barrel-aged wisdom, hand-stitched class, an old head, possibly on old shoulders. Four years later, there's still fluff on the needle and creases on the sleeve, those comparisons to Bill Withers, Van Morrison and Terry Callier not entirely glossed over. Adele, who he supported in 2011, hasn't lost interest in him, either, tweeting her excitement when he released the first new music from *Love & Hate*, his second album. Yet if that's where he has come from, *Love & Hate* makes a real effort to re-route his talents, creating a record that hasn't cut itself off from its predecessor, yet sounds more dramatically expansive and forward-facing.

Admittedly, it's not quite as *Night Of The Hunter* as that tattooed-knuckle title suggests, but *Love & Hate* still comes out swinging. His 2014 collaboration with Jack White on the Third Man single *You've Got Nothing To Lose* suggested Kiwanuka was broadening his reach, and here he teams up with Danger Mouse as producer, a canny choice to ensure his retro style doesn't get too old. From the start, the mood of change is clear: opening track, *Cold Little Heart*, is 10 minutes long, Kiwanuka's voice only cutting through the sorrowful heavenly chorus halfway through. *Black Man In A White World*, meanwhile, comes accompanied by the ominous police-car-crash video directed by Hiro Murai, a film-maker who has also worked with the generally less Radio 2-friendly Earl Sweatshirt and Flying Lotus. Inspired by the blues of Son House, the song's tense syncopated patter deepens into an urgent thrum as Kiwanuka makes his

Michael Kiwanuka:
"more dramatically
expansive and
forward-facing."



MICHAEL KIWANUKA CAN CONVEY A REAL RESTLESS UNEASE.

personal and political points ("I've found peace, but I'm not glad").

For all its homespun directness, his debut came wreathed in artifice – he was, after all, a millennial from Muswell Hill, not a '70s veteran – but *Love & Hate* feels even more artful and smart. Kiwanuka sings of love in crisis and core-shaking doubt, but amid the clouds of



female voices or gently weeping guitars – fruits of Danger Mouse’s lush production – he is positioned more as storyteller, commentator and MC, more poised and watchful than the standard singer-songwriter angst-conduit.

While he’s not easy like Sunday morning any more, there are times when Kiwanuka could have been a bit more difficult. There can be a lack of definition, the clichéd fear of commitment marring I’ll Never Love, Father’s Child revisiting Home Again’s themes of spirituality and faith. Falling sounds like a blurrily underdeveloped experiment in Radiohead atmospherics. Yet although there could be more sharp edges and fewer straight lines, Kiwanuka can convey a real restless

unease, a sense of just-contained inner conflict, never pushing too hard, never mistaking emoting for emotion. Vibrations of What’s Going On ripple through Cold Little Heart and the title track’s inner-city blues, while the high anxiety of Place I Belong bends and quivers with an elegant, precisely calibrated psychedelic wobble. “I’m moving on,” he sings over a swell of cosmic backing vocals and splashy drums. No doubt about it. If Home Again was a putting down of roots, a strong foundation, Love & Hate sounds like the work of a man looking for a new adventure. ★★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: Cold Little Heart | Black Man In A White World | Place I Belong

Life Of Brian

Three more
Danger Mouse-
helmed albums



Martina Topley Bird

The Blue God

INDEPENDIENTE,
2008

Danger Mouse (aka Brian Burton) helped connect Tricky’s former vocal foil with vintage girl-group beats and Amy Winehouse-style soul for her second solo album.

★★★



Norah Jones Little Broken Hearts

BLUE NOTE, 2012

Queen of jazzy romance swaps the supper-club for the less salubrious dives on her fifth album, texturally scuffed and burnished by Danger Mouse’s production.

★★★★



Beck Modern Guilt

XL, 2008

After the stodgy let-down of previous LP The Information, Beck got together with Burton for this short but sour burst of psych-rock gloom.

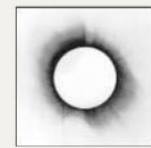
★★★★

ARCHITECTS

ALL OUR GODS HAVE ABANDONED US

EPITAPH, OUT 27 MAY

British metal’s loudest hopes deliver their bleakest, most uncompromising album yet.



Once upon a time the nascent UK metal scene saw Architects and Bring Me The Horizon share similar musical DNA strands.

That time has passed. Whereas their old touring partners achieved crossover success by dialling back the noise, Brighton-based Architects have doubled down on it. All Our Gods Have Abandoned Us is a confrontationally loud, brilliant album, and every bit as bleak as its title. Specifically, it’s a record that fights on two lyrical fronts. One is a war with a world riven by fundamentalism, corporatocracy and pollution, the other is the body’s own war with itself. Gruelling songs such as Memento Mori wrestle with mortality, a topic previously broached on 2014’s Lost Forever // Lost Together album as guitarist/lyricist Tom Searle himself suffered from melanoma skin cancer. There’s something very human at the heart of this inhuman noise. ★★★★★

GEORGE GARNER

Download: Memento Mori | The Empty Hourglass | Nihilist | A Match Made In Heaven

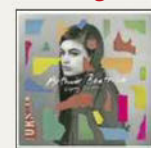
ARTHUR BEATRICE

KEEPING THE PEACE

OPEN ASSEMBLY RECORDINGS/POLYDOR,

OUT 20 MAY

Sophisticated London quartet’s second round of grown-up indie-pop.



There is such an aura of refined good taste around Arthur Beatrice’s second album that there are times when it’s like listening to a

Diptyque candle. Their songs suggest urban boho angst in the style of London Grammar or a more self-assured (and therefore less interesting) The xx, but All I Ask and Since We Were Kids aren’t that far from being Adele in fashion-student dungarees, or a Central Saint Martin’s Jess Glynne. The London Contemporary Orchestra pitch in and there’s a shot of house euphoria on Real Life, but Ella Girardot’s sumptuous voice means this music never loses its poise, an eternal, beautifully staged rendition of a late-night “it’s not you, it’s me” conversation. “All I have is this emotion,” she sings on Who Returned, encapsulating the problem with this elegant but ultimately unmoving record. ★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

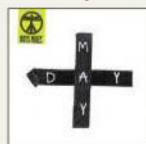
Download: Real Life | Brother | Who Returned

BOYS NOIZE

MAYDAY

BOYSNOIZE, OUT 20 MAY

German techno rebel keeps it turned up to 11.



Alongside fellow DJ-producers A-Trak and Tiga, Hamburg's Alexander Ridha has long been one of EDM's most reliable party-starters,

his steroid mash-ups fusing '90s rave with hip-twitching electro. Yet as remixer for Feist and Snoop Dogg among others, he's also adept at recycling pop hooks for the dancefloor, a mass appeal which marks out the best tracks on a typically pumped fourth studio album that throws everything into the mix, from Dynamite's drum'n'bass-flecked R&B to the Chemical Brothers-like techno-rap hybrid Euphoria. Starchild even adds a dash of alt-pop sweetness from Poliça, but, unsurprisingly given an album title that nods to the notoriously hard-partying German dance festival of the same name, the respite is brief. Ridha's focus here isn't on beauty but the beats. ★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: Dynamite | Euphoria | Starchild

MÉLANIE DE BIASIO

BLACKENED CITIES

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM, OUT 20 MAY

Short album or long track? Whichever, Euro-jazz noir at its most thrilling.



Conservatoire-trained Belgian keyboardist-singer De Biasio follows in footsteps running from Annette Peacock through Judy Nylon

and Grace Jones to Portishead and Björk: a female voice intimately spotlighted against pulsing noir-cum-dystopian soundscapes. Her second album, 2013's No Deal, collected seven jewel-like songs, the longest being eight minutes. Her third, a single track, triples that duration, accentuating all No Deal's most striking features: the dramatic chiaroscuro of her precise, close-mic'd



ISTEN TO THIS...
Elvis Costello



Taylor Swift
1989

VIRGIN EMI, 2014

"I saw Taylor Swift and Paul McCartney playing Shake It Off together with him on bass. It was at a party and that was pretty great! I think they also did I Saw Her Standing There. If a song is any good you've got to be able to play it on a few instruments without all the production, so I guess this is one of them."

voice atmospherically framed in booming space by Pascal Mohy's limpid piano, Dré Pallemmaerts's jazzy drums, plus bass, flute, cello and electronica. Evoking a blend of Grace Jones's Walking In The Rain and The Doors' Riders On The Storm, Blackened Cities is a gripping movie for the ears which ends as dawn's first light glows on the night horizon. ★★

MAT SNOW

Download: Blackened Cities

VANESSA CARLTON

LIBERMAN

DINE ALONE, OUT NOW

Not your everyday Nashville singer-songwriter.



A Thousand Miles and its triple-platinum parent album Be Not Nobody introduced Carlton in 2002 as a new Nelly Furtado, but as her music

matured over three subsequent albums the sales and chart positions drooped. Where 2011's Rabbits On The Run seemed emotionally walled off, Liberman begins to reopen the door into her inner world, if only a crack. Named after her grandfather and written in the wake of marriage, motherhood and a move from New York, these songs sound personal and intimate even if they're still rather oblique. Circular melodies and plaintive piano give Liberman a downbeat air, and there's not a lot to whistle along to, but as a suite it becomes hypnotic, wafting the listener along on pillowy clouds. Carlton's transition from "indie" pop princess to serious artist seems almost complete. ★★

ANDY FYFE

Download: Take It Easy | House Of Seven Swords | Matter Of Time

DEUX FURIEUSES

TRACKS OF WIRE

SELF-RELEASED, OUT 20 MAY

Anger masterclass from Anglo-Scottish two-piece.



Meaning "two angry females" in French, one suspects that the nom de guerre chosen by Glasgow/London duo Ros Cairney and Vas

Antoniadou wasn't arrived at by chance. Their self-released debut album positively bristles with rage, most notably on Are We Sexy Enough?, which deals unflinchingly with the politics of rape, while I Want My Life Back addresses the Arab Spring. PJ Harvey's former drummer/arranger Rob Ellis produces, and the fat-free, streamlined song structures recall Rid Of Me. However, they owe their biggest musical debt to Savages, the harshness and austerity of their debut reprised in album opener Can We Talk About This?. However, they're most effective when they slow down on Kill Us, which nods to Led Zeppelin's Immigrant

Song before locking into a menacing groove. A bold and accomplished debut. ★★

PHIL MONGREDIEN

Download: Kill Us | Dream For Change | The Party Of Shaitaan

DOOMSQUAD

TOTAL TIME

BELLA UNION, OUT 6 MAY

Glorious pagan dance-rock from Canada via the New Mexican desert.



Who Owns Noon In Sandusky?, the opening track on Domsquad's second album, is a pounding dance-rock anthem written,

they say, to "inspire the nakedness in us all". It probably explains why the trio decamped to New Mexico's desert to record Total Time, their native Toronto being less conducive to alfresco nudity. The album sits somewhere between Goat's theatre of the psychedelically absurd and the gothic spookiness of old 4AD acts such as His Name Is Alive. Half the material here sounds on the cusp of a toss-up whether they're going to break into Gregorian chants or a rumbling bass-driven wig-out. Generally it's the latter, though the two co-exist on the brilliant Solar Ass, and folk oddball Mary Margaret O'Hara pops up to melt down on the throbbing The Very Large Array. File under soundtracks to mescaline days and animal sacrifice nights. ★★

STEVE YATES

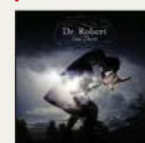
Download: Who Owns Noon In Sandusky? | Solar Ass | Russian Gaze

DR ROBERT

OUT THERE

FENCAT, OUT NOW

Blow Monkeys groover sends acoustic postcards from rural Andalusia.



"I fell into a bottomless pit and no matter what I tried I couldn't climb out of it," croons Robert Howard, sometime '80s pop pin-up, three tracks

in on his 10th solo record. It's a discreet confessional of a post-fame "booze hell", yet the good doctor has never found himself in a creative dead end, or short of a tune – this is his 19th album since his Monkeys debuted in 1984. After highlights including 1986 Transatlantic hit Digging Your Scene and 1994's solo debut Realms Of Gold, these days he's shackled up in the Sierra Nevada foothills, dispensing such deceptively well-crafted songbook albums as this from his kitchen. Drawing in friends such as Richard Dudanski, drummer from Joe Strummer's pre-Clash 101'ers, he skips from dusky jazz to literate torch balladry to whitey blues in as many tracks, rarely falling short of first class. ★★

ANDREW PERRY

Download: A Bottomless Pit | Lost In Rasa | Don't Throw Our Love Away



Corinne Bailey Rae:
“doesn’t need
tragedy to soar.”

RAE OF LIGHT

Leeds songwriter goes for uplift on her third effort.



CORINNE BAILEY RAE THE HEART SPEAKS IN WHISPERS

VIRGIN, OUT 13 MAY

What goes down

must come up. Mostly written in the wake of the alcohol/methadone-related death of her first husband Jason Rae, 2010’s harrowing *The Sea* established Corinne Bailey Rae as a major talent, understandably light years from the woman responsible for the airy self-titled debut album four years previously.

Never one to be rushed even when times were good, she wisely took time to make her next move. This time, she’s left it for six palate-cleansing years, during which she married Steve Brown, her musical director and co-producer. Started at her own studio in Leeds and finished in Capital Studio in Los Angeles, *The Heart Speaks In Whispers* is the sound of her getting it right again. It stands midway between *The Sea*’s bleakness (while retaining its bravery) and her debut’s friskiness (while retaining its pop heart), with added dollops of sultriness and life-affirmation. She barely wastes a note. Horse Print Dress bounces from a curt, finger-clicking opening where Bailey Rae toots, “ooh ooh” as if auditioning for a *Carry On* film, into a soul-tinged jamboree that nods to D’Angelo and good-period Prince (it was co-written with Paris Strother of King, the band managed by Prince). Elsewhere, the gospel-tinged Walk

IT STANDS MIDWAY BETWEEN
THE SEA’S BLEAKNESS AND
HER DEBUT’S FRISKINESS.

On evokes Isaac Hayes’s take on *Walk On By* in more than title; the Sade-infused Hey, I Won’t Break Your Heart is balm for troubled souls and *Stop Where You Are* features her biggest chorus yet. She doesn’t need tragedy to soar. ★★ ★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: Horse Print Dress | Stop Where You Are | Hey, I Won’t Break Your Heart



John Aizlewood talks to Corinne Bailey Rae about moving on and her “hopeful” new LP.

How were you after you had finished touring and promoting *The Sea*? It must have been emotionally and physically exhausting?

“Until I stopped I didn’t realise how emotionally drained I was. I’d been buzzing playing places I never thought I’d see, such as

Brazil, Argentina and Indonesia, but when it finished it was the moment to work out what I wanted to do, whether to keep going. I quite like working, so I built my own studio in Leeds.”

Obviously you couldn’t remake *The Sea*...

“Oh no. I wanted this record to be

full of hope. The strange thing was that so many lyrics came from my subconscious. For *Walk On* I just opened my mouth and sang; I didn’t know what the lyrics were until I played them back on my phone; while *The Skies Will Break* came from a dream I had of a runner sobbing after a false start, knowing they’ll never catch the others. I was trying to encourage people, but now I know it was me who needed the encouragement.”

And in the middle of recording you got married again...

“Oh yes! We were married three years ago. Myself and Steve [Brown, co-producer and musical director] have been friends for 18 years. Sometimes, over time you see another side of someone you think you know so well.”

What do you want?

“I want to put myself in the world and re-connect. I’d forgotten that people like me. I’ve made it back to myself.”

THE LAST DANCE



With DJ fees skyrocketing and love for dance music waning in the US, **RUPERT HOWE** asks, is this is the END for EDM?



Exit plan: Avicii has announced his retirement.

At the end of March, Swedish DJ and producer Tim Bergling, who authors skyscraping trance anthems under the alias Avicii, posted a lengthy message on his website stating that 2016 would mark his retirement from live appearances and touring. The 26-year-old cited personal reasons: "I have too little left for the life of a real person behind the artist." But while his announcement was undoubtedly sad news for fans of fist-pumping electronic pop, it coincided with other news stories which suggest that, in America at least, the past decade's EDM-powered boom may be coming to an end.

Perhaps inevitably, the warning signs are flashing brightest of all in Las Vegas. Could the pool-party capital of America, which helped make zillionaires out of Avicii, Deadmau5 and Tiësto, really be set to turn its back on EDM? According to the city's club mogul Victor Drai, "people are sick of the DJs in Vegas," while former XS nightclub executive Jesse Waits recently dismissed EDM audiences as "not cool" before admitting, "We created a monster." Certainly the EDM scene has an insatiable appetite – for money. Glitzy

THE PRIVATE JETS OF THE DJ ELITE ARE ALTERING THEIR FLIGHT PATHS TO TAP NEW CASH RESERVES IN RUSSIA AND ASIA.

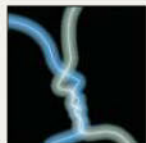
pleasuredome Hakkasan, for instance, is reported to pay its star DJ Calvin Harris \$400,000 per show, which might also explain why a litre of vodka at its VIP "bottle service" tables costs \$600. Yet for all EDM's excesses and absurdities – Paris Hilton's Ibiza residency; Zac Efron's misguided 2015 club movie *We Are Your Friends*; Skrillex's hair – the party's not over just yet.

In fact, spurred on by the prospect of a post-EDM comedown in the US, the private jets of the DJ elite are altering their flight paths to tap new cash reserves in Russia and Asia – David Guetta has already scaled the Great Wall Of China. Even Bergling himself doesn't rule out a return at some point. That is, when he considers the time, or maybe the price, is right.

THE DUKE SPIRIT

KIN

EX VOTO, OUT 6 MAY

Resurrected gloom rockers' fourth.

Extended career breaks aren't always a good idea – just ask The Fratellis. However, having found themselves both label-less and rudderless after

2011's *Bruiser*, The Duke Spirit's enforced hiatus has allowed shards of daylight into an often claustrophobic worldview. "I've been leading myself blindly," sighs Liela Moss in Pacific, tacitly acknowledging their decade-long journey from 2005 debut *Cuts Across The Land*, while *Here Comes The Vapour* achieves a dream-like quality thanks to Simon Raymonde's glacial production. There are still flashes of the old blood'n'thunder – not least on a pulverising *Side By Side* – but the overall effect is of a band who have experienced life's slings and arrows but now exude both tenderness and wisdom. ★★★★★

PAUL MOODY

Download: *Side By Side* | *Wounded Wing* | *Here Comes The Vapour*

EAGULLS

ULLAGES

PARTISAN, OUT 13 MAY

Leeds punks change their sound on intriguing second album.

With hindsight, Eagulls' self-titled 2014 debut can be seen as part of an ongoing flair-up of British groups moaning about how terrible everything

is (see also Fat White Family and Sleaford Mods). Still, there was no denying they were good at it, attacking their subject with a heft that owed much both to US punk and their own genesis in the Leeds' DIY scene. On *Ullages*, though, they've decided to jag in a radically different direction, aiming here for a shimmering gloom that's reminiscent of early Cure records. By and large, it works. The surging melancholy of *Euphoria* and the Cocteau Twins atmospheric of *Velvet* suggest a band who might yet develop into something of real significance. ★★★★★

JAMES OLDHAM

Download: *Euphoria* | *Velvet* | *Lemontrees*

DANA FALCONBERRY AND MEDICINE BOW

FROM THE FOREST CAME THE FIRE

BB*SLAND, OUT 13 MAY

Hello birds, hello sky, hello Dana.

So at one with nature that she's touring US National Parks this summer, Missouri's Dana Falconberry works for a chain-stitch embroidery

company by day and has released five albums since 2007. This one, pledge-funded and mostly produced by Spoon drummer Jim Eno, is a rustic, layered, bonkers affair. She declares, "I am a snail shell/I am an oak leaf" on *Cormorant*; she's ambushed by ravens, jackdaws and bees on *Dolomite*; and she finds her blood "brayed, bellowed and beared" on *Alamogordo*. Yet, for all its heroic silliness, Falconberry's sense of wonder carries the day. Like a more earthbound Joanna Newsom, she's no stranger to a walloping melody either, so Cora Cora is as lovely as they come and Oxheart runs it close. ★★★★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: *Cora Cora* | *Oxheart* | *Dolomite*

FEWS

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM, OUT 20 MAY

Swedish-American band keep it cryptic.

There is an impressive inscrutability about FEWS, not just in their name and the title of their debut album, but in their dense and hectic

songs. Anxiety seems to be the quartet's keynote mood, though, spidery guitar dread scuttling up and down the spines of *Drinking Games* and *The Queen*, post-punk aggro lurking round the corners of *The Zoo*. *Zlatan* is an immersive tribute to footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, but that's about as worldly as *Means* gets, preferring instead to hover in the Neu!-like ether of *Ill* or descend into the urgent mania of 100 *Goosebumps*. Traces of *Interpol*, *The Chameleons* and post-rock heavies *Trans Am* are all over these songs, but if FEWS don't wear their influences lightly, they know how to show them off to dark advantage. ★★★★★

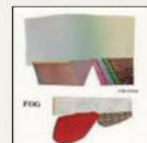
VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: *The Zoo* | *100 Goosebumps* | *Ill* | *Zlatan*

FOG

FOR GOOD

TOTALLY GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, OUT 13 MAY

Alt-electronica maverick re-emerges from obscurity.

Back in 2002, Fog's self-titled debut signalled an attempt to marry experimental alternative rock with glitchy alternative hip-hop. But

following the conventional indie scrawl of 2007's *Ditherer*, the project's prime mover, Minneapolis multi-instrumentalist Andrew Broder, seemed to have lost interest in cross-genre experiments, preferring to integrate himself into Midwestern rockers *Cloak Ox*. This return after nearly a decade recaptures the restless spirit of those early albums, feeding Broder's emotive falsetto through skittering drum loops and layers of digital drone. Opener *For Good* builds from



Catfish And The Bottlemen:
“an intriguing step forward.”

MOVING ON UP

A little darkness keeps Van McCann's dream in reach.



CATFISH AND THE BOTTLEMEN THE RIDE

ISLAND, OUT 27 MAY

Success can be dangerous for a band like Catfish And The

Bottlemen. In 2014, debut *The Balcony* carved an Everyman appeal with songs about love and life in small towns. A quarter-of-a-million sales later, they've won a Brit Award and had breakfast with Ewan McGregor. High times, but not necessarily fertile ones for their everyday romanticism.

Frontman Van McCann insured against this with a cache of approximately 100 already-written songs. Thus *The Ride* transports him back from rock'n'roll adventure to a world of fag breaks and carrying girlfriends through town. Sonically, though, Catfish have made a small, intriguing step forward. Jet and Oasis

producer Dave Sardy is an adroit crafter of anthemic indie-rock driven by punchy riffs and choruses that ignite like distress flares. Here, he helps add texture, detail and, crucially, some darkness to Catfish. There's a sinister throb to jealous-ex anthem *Red*, while acoustic ballad *Heathrow* introduces appealing vulnerability to McCann's emotional palette. The best track is *Outside*, a song of alienation full of slow climbs, dizzying drops and a chorus given a thrilling undertow by a descending guitar figure.

Against these new depths and moods, Oxygen's breezy, Kinks-via-Oasis stomp can feel routine.

McCann's not interested in reinventing music. He's always maintained he wants to make anthems to unite house parties and festival fields in song. It's straightforward rock'n'roll and it's done with irresistible vim and contagious melody. McCann's world may be changing but his dream remains to headline stadiums. Don't bet against it. ★★★★★

MATT MASON

Download: 7 | Twice | Red | Heathrow | Outside

spare piano ballad to effects-heavy meltdown, while Jim's orchestral stylings fuse left-field electronica with Of Montreal's theatrical pop. Having given himself just eight tracks to play with, though, Broder ends up with more ideas than he has songs to fit them into. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: For Good | Kid Kuma | Jim

BRUCE FOXTON

SMASH THE CLOCK

BASS TONE, OUT 20 MAY

Jam bassist revisits Woking Wonders' classic sound.



Bruce Foxton's relentless touring with From The Jam has given him a unique insight into what his public wants.

Accordingly, much like 2012's excellent *Back In The Room*, this crowd-funded follow-up is a hook-laden homage to his former band's 1979-1982 golden period. So, we get brassy singalongs (*Now The Time Has Come*), Joanna-driven suburban vignettes (*Sunday Morning*) and twitchy R&B stomps (the Wilko Johnson assisted *Full Circle*) all delivered with ringing Rickenbackers and a carpe diem intensity. The Modfather himself even provides guitar and piano on two tracks (*Pictures & Diamonds* and *Louder*, respectively). However, so uncannily similar is singer Russell Hastings's Rothmans-infused rasp, Weller could be singing the whole lot and it would be impossible to tell. ★★★★★

PAUL MOODY

Download: Now The Time Has Come | Full Circle | Pictures & Diamonds

FRIGHTENED RABBIT

PAINTING OF A PANIC ATTACK

ATLANTIC, OUT NOW

Emotional Scottish rockers get timely assistance from The National.



Signing to a major label can make or break a band, though for the quintet led by vocalist Scott Hutchison, the release of 2013's Top 10 album *Pedestrian Verse* almost did both.

The following year guitarist Gordon Skene departed, while Hutchison himself moved to the US and ended up sending song ideas to his remaining bandmates via email. Yet this follow-up builds confidently on its predecessor's potential, the presence of The National's Aaron Dessner as producer helping them to discover a new balance between anthemic intensity and emotional depth on *Get Out*'s surging evocation of an obsessive relationship or the synth-powered throb of *I Wish I Was Sober*. Only Break's lapse into unreconstructed arena-rock strikes a jarring note. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: Get Out | I Wish I Was Sober | Still Want To Be Here

THIS RECORD'S INTERNAL LANDSCAPE
IS ONE OF KNOTTY, INTRICATE
TWISTS AND DARK CORNERS.

Kevin Morby:
“he fits the
rambling minstrel
mould well.”

LONE STAR

Texan troubadour cuts through
the singer-songwriter crowd.



KEVIN MORBY SINGING SAW

DEAD OCEANS, OUT NOW

It's wise to be wary of art
that seems to be striving for
the “Great American” prefix.
A phrase suggesting endless
imaginative spaces, it

unfortunately tends to get boiled down to railroads,
telegraph wires, travelling men, and more railroads.
Listen to that crossing light creaking in the wind.

Kevin Morby's third album seems to drop him deep
into that territory. He fits the rambling minstrel mould
well: born in Texas, raised in Kansas City, blooded in
Brooklyn (where he was bassist with folk-rockers
Woods), now settled in Los Angeles. An obsession
with The Band sent him to Woodstock to record
Singing Saw. Yet despite the mentions of coyotes and
vultures, this record is stranger than the boho-hobo
trappings suggest, its internal landscape one of knotty,
intricate twists and dark corners. The biblical rage
of *I Have Been To The Mountain* is dedicated to Eric
Garner, who died after being put in a chokehold
by New York Police. “Have you heard the sound of
a man stop breathing?” Morby asks, while female
voices and brass – exemplifying this record's subtle
light-and-shade orchestration – sit in sad judgement
behind him. Not escapist fantasy, then, but a cold
state-of-the-nation address.

His country/city split is reflected in a delivery that
falls between Lou Reed (the rattling Dorothy) and
Bob Dylan (Black Flowers), but he also echoes PJ
Harvey on the title track's flushed delirium, the sound
of an overheated imagination sweating out visions
of a saw that can both cut and sing (complete with
the instrument's silvery keen). Beauty that can slice
down to bone: double-edged and deep. ★★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: Singing Saw | Dorothy | I Have Been To
The Mountain



BRONAGH GALLAGHER GATHER YOUR GREATNESS

SALTY DOG, OUT 27 MAY

Old-school emotional tour-de-force
peppers the target.



An actress since
the age of 17, with
credits including The
Commitments, War
Horse, Sherlock
Holmes and Pulp Fiction,

Derry's Gallagher has a parallel singer-
songwriter career in the Van Morrison
tradition of summoning epiphany from
the classic sounds of America's streets.
From its title onwards she's no shrinking
violet, her third album swaggering like
Carole King in her golden years, a blend of
blue-eyed soul and Broadway showstoppers
with hammering piano and New York
Latino boom-chick-boo-boom-chick
drums. Though an inspirational goldmine,
it's also a tough act to follow, and the earth
only seismically moves on the swearsy
Stranger, an outstanding Gallagher
co-write with producers Conor Brady
and Cian Boylan. As for the mostly fine
other nine songs, drive-time Radio 2 gold
beckons. ★★★★★

MAT SNOW

Download: Stranger | Every Place |
A Sailor Like You

DAPHNE GUINNESS OPTIMIST IN BLACK

AGENT ANONYME/ABSOLUTE, OUT 27 MAY

Aristocratic fashion polymath tries
glam and psych on for size.



If we can ask one thing of
the rich, it is never to be
dull. Daphne Guinness,
the brewing heiress,
Mitford granddaughter
and unconventional

fashion icon who grew up with Salvador Dali
as a neighbour, has heeded that imperative.
Though Guildhall-trained and a lifelong
music lover, she's waited till her 40s to make
a record. Optimist In Black, partly inspired
by the suicides of friends Alexander
McQueen and Isabella Blow, was written
with Irish composer Pat Donne and
produced in New York by Tony Visconti
(concurrently with Blackstar; Bowie himself
dropped in on the sessions). It's firmly
rooted in the late '60s/early '70s, its main
modes orchestral glam and bejewelled
psych, with Daphne's dominatrix diction
at its most delicious when pouring scorn
upon unworthy suitors and tedious
time-wasters. Guinness is many things,
but she's never being boring. ★★★★★

SIMON PRICE

Download: Evening In Space |
Optimist In Black | Marionettes

STEVE GUNN EYES ON THE LINES

MATADOR, OUT 3 JUNE

Kurt Vile sideman continues to forge his own idiosyncratic road music.



Probably best known as being one of Kurt Vile's Violators, Steve Gunn is actually a prolific and captivating songwriter in his own

right, trading in a kind of expansive existential road music. A gifted, innovative guitarist, he evokes the timeless experimentation of someone like John Fahey, and sings like a prairie Lou Reed. *Eyes On The Lines* is the follow-up to his excellent 2014 album *Way Out Weather* and it finds Gunn rolling down the same never-ending dusty highway. With their fleeting references to "outlaw thoughts" and "feeling the path", the songs here – particularly the airy glide of *Full Moon Tide* and the propulsive psych of *Heavy Sails* – beautifully conjure up classic American notions of freedom and escape. He might not know exactly where he's heading, but he sure makes you want to tag along for the ride. ★★★★★

JAMES OLDHAM

Download: *Full Moon Tide* | *Nature Driver* | *Conditions Wild*

KATE JACKSON BRITISH ROAD MOVIES

HOOHA, OUT 20 MAY

Ex-Long Blonde hits asphalt with Bernard Butler.



Kate Jackson – until 2008, front-moll for Sheffield thrift-store glam merchants The Long Blondes – knows the endless

highways of the American interior outshine the rubbish-strewn B-roads, dual carriageways and bypasses of Britain, but she's still aware of their artistic and emotive possibilities. Hence this long-gestating debut solo album. Recorded with ex-Suede guitar ace and producer Bernard Butler, it presents vignettes of runaways, sex workers, deadbeat dads and others over dramatic indie-rock with electronic flourishes. An intriguing drive-time playlist results, with things getting Pulp-y on the Phil Spector-pop *16 Years*, The Atlantic recalling Berlin-era Bowie and long-distance haulage reverie *Homeward Bound* finding Butler synthesizing the sound of post-punk Manchester with a smoother kind of radio rock. Certain songs are paired with Jackson's spare, realist paintings of flyovers, motorways and street scenes – her other graphic passion being brutalist concrete tower blocks – enhancing the queasy glamour yet further. ★★★★★

IAN HARRISON

Download: *Homeward Bound* | *16 Years* | *The Atlantic*

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE ELECTRONICA 2: THE HEART OF NOISE

COLUMBIA, OUT 6 MAY

Another late-career bomb from French synth veteran.



By the mid-'80s Jean-Michel Jarre was the self-anointed king of prog-electronica, staging huge outdoor spectacles tricked out with

fireworks and laser harps. Musically, though, his reputation still rests squarely on 1976's florid, platinum-selling debut *Oxygène*. Now 67, he's attempted to recast himself as a pop Svengali, last year's patchy collaborative opus *Electronica 1: The Time Machine* followed by this equally underwhelming sequel. Jarre's trademark whooshes and arpeggios frame celebrity guests whose contributions range from the predictable (Pet Shop Boys, Gary Numan) to the misguided (a clunky mash-up of Primal Scream's *Come Together*). It's all a bit of a mess, with even the more arresting efforts – Julia Holter's seraphic turn on *These Creatures* and *Swipe To The Right*'s giddy, Cyndi Lauper-assisted disco – sounding like they belong on different albums. ★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: *These Creatures* | *Swipe To The Right*

KACY & CLAYTON STRANGE COUNTRY

NEW WEST, OUT NOW

Canadian cousins recreate Brit-folk's golden era.



Slip *Strange Country* between, say, Fairport Convention's *Unhalfbricking* and *Steeleye Span*'s *Hark! The Village Wait* and

you'd be forgiven for thinking it was a lost late-'60s Brit-folk gem. All the more remarkable, then, that this LP is made by two young cousins (Kacy Anderson is 18, Clayton Linthicum, 21) who come from the rural vastness of Saskatchewan rather than prim south-west London. A sometime guitarist with fellow prairie folkers The Deep Dark Woods, Linthicum's acoustic playing and vocals dovetail perfectly with Anderson's crystal voice like prime Richard and Linda Thompson. Although three traditional tunes accompany their original songs, their songwriting is as impressive as their execution. A beautiful album that nudges a classic past into a brave future. ★★★★★

ANDY FYFE

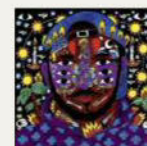
Download: *Strange Country* | *The Rio Grande* | *Down At The Dancehall*

KAYTRANADA

99.9%

XL, OUT 6 MAY

Assured debut from Madonna-endorsed electronica prodigy.



On Soundcloud, Haitian-born, Quebec-raised producer Louis Kevin Celestin enjoys star status, his bootleg remix of Janet

Jackson's *If* having clocked up nearly six million plays. In the offline world, however, the 23-year-old remains a cult figure, despite last year scoring studio time with Rick Rubin and opening for Madonna at two arena shows on her *Rebel Heart* tour. This collection of stylish urban beats should help redress the balance, especially the way he shifts nimbly from *Track Uno*'s funky house to *Drive Me Crazy*'s woozy hip-hop. The latter's vocal by US rapper Vic Mensa is one of numerous expertly framed cameos, AlunaGeorge adding pop sass to *Together* and American R&B star Anderson .Paak mesmeric on *Glowed Up*. As a calling card, it's as close to perfection as the title suggests. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: *Together* | *Drive Me Crazy* | *Glowed Up*

JESSY LANZA OH NO

HYPERDUB, OUT 13 MAY

More blissed-out beats from Canadian synth-pop siren.



In high school Jessie Lanza was a starry-eyed fan of Timbaland and Missy Elliott. You could hear the fixation on the Hamilton, Ontario

singer's seductive 2013 debut album, *Pull My Hair Back*, which filtered '90s-era R&B through artfully blurred electronica. Again teaming with producer Jeremy Greenspan, half of electro-pop duo

Junior Boys and another Hamilton native, the 30-year-old's luminous harmonies and aerated vocal style – think Grimes, with a touch of Aaliyah – are here set against more sharply outlined rhythmic patterns, flirting with twitchy '80s soul (*VV Violence*), dizzy New York disco (*Never Enough*) and even minimal African electro (*It Means I Love You*). Though for all the deft production touches, it's Lanza's lost-on-the-dancefloor persona, at once sensuous and mysterious, which supplies the magic touch. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: *VV Violence* | *Never Enough* | *It Means I Love You* | *Going Somewhere*

Daphne Guinness: "pouring scorn upon unworthy suitors and tedious time-wasters."



CYNDI LAUPER

DETOUR

SIRE, OUT 6 MAY

Pop icon's "dirty and sexy" R&B country LP ends up as Friday night megamix.



A Cyndi Lauper country covers album: does the world need such a thing? Nope, but we've got one and the great and good of the Nashville scene are

on board. Lauper's distinctive voice sounds most at home providing a counterpoint to Willie Nelson's grizzling on *Night Life* or larking about with Vince Gill in *You're The Reason Our Kids Are Ugly*; she suffers when foregrounded by the often plodding music behind her. The thing that's missing from *Detour*, though, is emotion. No one is buying the odd theatrical tremolo (*Hard Candy Christmas*) or melodramatic gasp (*The End Of The World*), and the album doesn't compensate for its lack of convincing sadness with anything fun. If it's not going to have you weeping into your whisky or raucously line dancing with someone inappropriate, what's the point? ★★

KATE SOLOMON

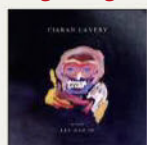
Download: *Night Life*

CIARAN LAVERY

LET BAD IN

BELIEVE RECORDINGS, OUT 27 MAY

Northern Irish artist shows off his songwriting skills.



In 2016, Ciaran Lavery is very much the dapper, multiple-million-streaming, singer-songwriter dude, crisp of suit and wiry of beard,

but as a kid growing up in the tiny village of Aghagallon, south-east of Belfast, he worshipped Green Day and Eminem. Happily, just the barest echo of all that teen snottiness adds enough grit and edge to mark out Lavery from the morass of sensitive bedroom blokes who stalk the land. Recent single *Return To Form* has hip-hop production tweaks and carefully placed profanity, while *Blood Red Fist* and the beautiful *Okkervil River* revel in a natural swing and soul that round out their already sizeable appeal. ★★★★★

ROB FITZPATRICK

Download: *Return To Form* | *Blood Red Fist* | *Okkervil River*

LONELY THE BRAVE

THINGS WILL MATTER

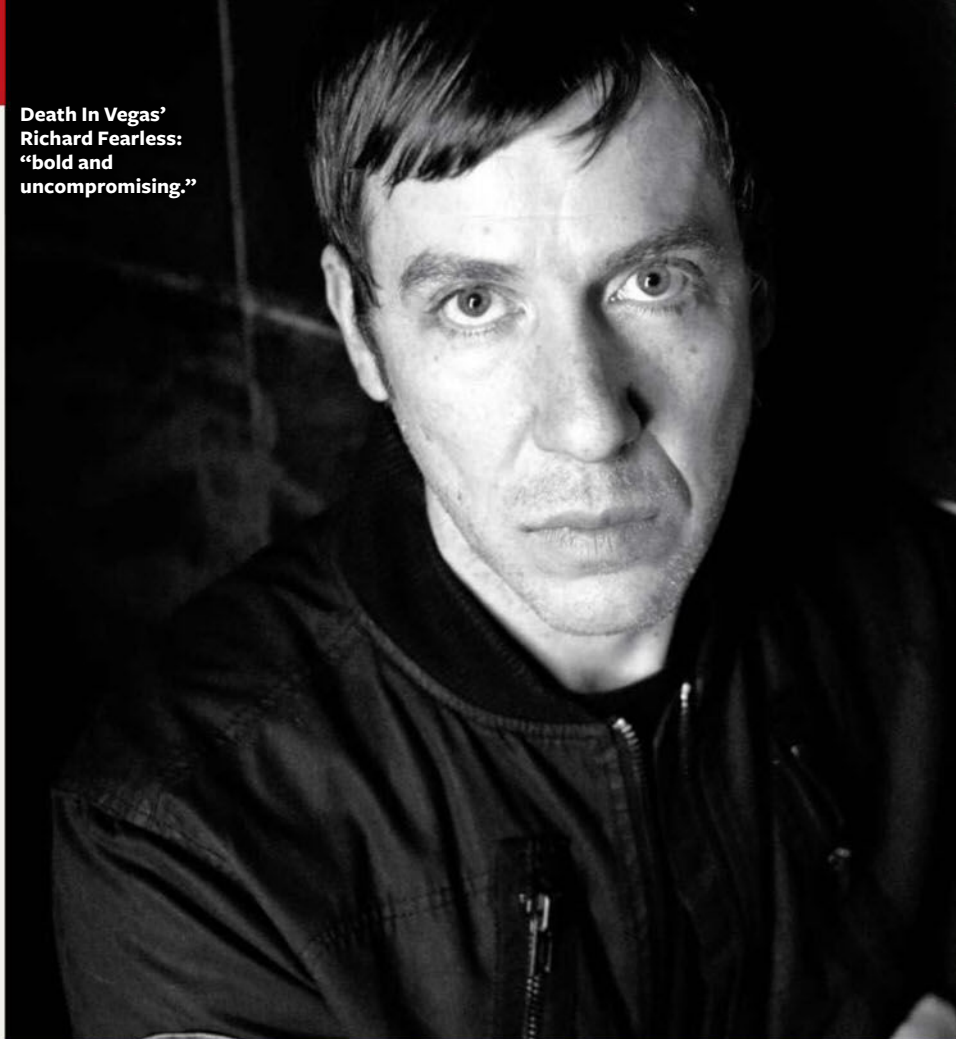
HASSLE, OUT 20 MAY

Hugely compelling second outing from rising Cambridge alt-rock stars.



Lonely The Brave have fast become a go-to band for fans of emotionally devastating (and devastated) rock for good reason. Their 2014

Death In Vegas' Richard Fearless: "bold and uncompromising."



GRAVE ON

Dance-rock maverick returns with moody electro masterclass.



DEATH IN VEGAS

TRANSMISSION

DRONE, OUT 27 MAY

Always expect the unexpected with a new Death In Vegas release. Since emerging from the

same London "big beat" Sunday Social club scene that spawned The Chemical Brothers in the mid-'90s, DIV mainstay Richard Fearless has trampled a wayward path, making intense, precision-tooled "head" music which variously channels drone rock, post-punk, techno, dub, psychedelia and Krautrock. The highpoint was 1999's *The Contino Sessions*, a spooky rock-electro hybrid boasting vocal contributions from Iggy Pop, Bobby Gillespie and Jim Reid. While *Satan's Circus*, from 2004, was a disappointing vocal- and tune-free affair which marked the beginning of a seven-year hiatus for Fearless as he relocated to Brooklyn to study photography and form psych-rock outfit Black Acid. So when the brilliant glowstick rave of *Your Loft My Acid* appeared five years ago, the lead-off single from *Trans-Love Energies*, it heralded a rejuvenated return

and another unexpected musical left-turn.

It's the sleek electro groove of *Your Loft...* which appears to serve as the sonic template for much of DIV's sixth album, *Transmission*, recorded without longtime collaborator Tim Holmes. Revealing its crepuscular charms slowly, 11-minute ambient-dub opener *Metal Box* whirrs and clicks into life, its creeping dread atmosphere setting the tone for what follows. Artist/writer Sasha Grey coos and sighs over *Consequences Of Love*'s molten, mutant funk, seemingly charting a destructive relationship but sounding like a detuned sex-chat TV ad from some Ballardian dystopia. Best of all is the title track's lush, coming-up techno, its dubby textures recalling a sexed-up version of Berlin label Basic Channel's minimalist aesthetic. By the time the sleazy throb of *You Disco I Freak* arrives – imagine the hypnotic pulse of Donna Summer's *I Feel Love* relocated to the sticky dancefloor of a dingy Euro S&M club – resistance is futile.

Bold and uncompromising, *Transmission* is Death In Vegas' most coherent and compelling record yet. Where next, you wonder? ★★★★★

SIMON McEWEN

Download: *Transmission* | *Mind Control* | *Arise* | *You Disco I Freak*

debut, *The Day's War*, was an intoxicating blend of post-rock musicality and bruised meditations on life – a record Pearl Jam might have made had they worshipped at the altar of Mogwai rather than The Who. *Things Will Matter* darkens and expands this vision magnificently, but the root of their appeal remains singer David Jakes. He delivers shell-shocked lyrics and soaring melodies on *Black Mire* as if exorcising them from his body. With producer Ross Orton (Arctic Monkeys/M.I.A.) capturing their musical light and shade perfectly, even *Wait In The Car*'s sublime minimalism sounds huge. It all makes for a remarkable second album. ★★★★★

GEORGE GARNER

Download: *Wait In The Car* | *Black Mire*

MAYFLOWER MADAME OBSERVED IN A DREAM

NIGHT CULT, OUT 20 MAY

Debut album from Norwegian drone rockers.



Vampiric vocals, reverb-drenched guitars, a general whiff of the graveyard: this Oslo quartet are more gothic than a Bauhaus convention. Mercifully, however, shards of daylight occasionally pierce their black cloud of introspection. *Lovesick* is a feverish nod to Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, while the needling guitars and motorik rhythm of *Upside Down* (The Death Loop) possess the spacey menace of early Verve. The sense of alienation found in Trond Fagernes's lyrics occasionally smacks of teenage poetry. However, his delivery – a creepy croon worthy of Andrew Eldritch – and a keen underlying pop sensibility ensures that at their best (Weightless) this chilly Scandi-noir is more than just musical dry ice. ★★★★★

PAUL MOODY

Download: *Lovesick* | *Weightless*

MELVINS BASSES LOADED

IPPECAC, OUT 3 JUNE

Washington State proto-grungers in straight-up metal mode.



In the decades since Kurt Cobain roadied for them in the mid-'80s, Buzz Osborne's Melvins have been through numerous changes. They were instrumental in shaping Seattle grunge's take on Sabbath-style slo-mo metal. They've since recorded for Atlantic, toured with Dead Kennedys' Jello Biafra on vocals, and become icons of the Sunn O))) -led doom scene. This 24th LP finds them back probing the vintage-metal motherlode, with a rotating cast of bassists filling their current vacancy in that department. Catching the eye more than the ear, the rickety *Maybe I Am Amused* features Nirvana's Krist Novoselic. Meatier stuff surfaces on the

quintessentially sludgy War Pussy, while *I Want To Tell You* thrillingly imagines Osborne's heroes, Kiss, covering The Beatles in hypermelodic proto-psych mode. Both of those feature Redd Kross's Steve McDonald, so he definitely wins the bass-off. ★★★★★

ANDREW PERRY

Download: *Maybe I Am Amused* | *I Want To Tell You* | *War Pussy*

METHYL ETHEL OH INHUMAN SPECTACLE

4AD, OUT NOW

Perth-based friends of Tame Impala extend Australia's purple patch for absorbing neo-psychedelia:



This Perth trio's debut was largely made alone by creative linchpin Jake Webb in a remote coastal hideaway. Not surprisingly then, an air of isolation and introspection knits together a psych-rock record that explores chiming dream-pop (Shadowboxing), murky R&B (Also Gesellschaft) and open-road choruses (Twilight Driving). When Webb finds a propulsive groove – on Shadowboxing or the celestial funk of *Idée Fixe* – it's a compelling mix, although the gaseous atmospheres and subtle melodies of *Unbalancing Acts* and *To Swim* drift too far towards shapelessness. It's a highly promising debut nonetheless – and another intriguing despatch from Australia's modern psych scene. ★★★★★

MATT MASON

Download: *Idée Fixe* | *Shadowboxing* | *Also Gesellschaft* | *Twilight Driving*

DAN MICHAELSON & THE COASTGUARDS MEMORY

STATE 51 CONSPIRACY, OUT 6 MAY

Emotional rescue from lovelorn singer-songwriter.



Memory provides the final instalment of a trilogy Dan Michaelson began with *Blindspot* in 2013 and continued with *Distance* the next year.

Following the breakdown of a relationship, it's made for a raw and strikingly vulnerable collection, at times reeling from the loss of love, at others, sounding more sanguine. In *Memory* he finds his most reflective tone – the hurt still keening, but distant enough now to bring a gentleness and fluidity to his thought. On the title track, he's considering the way we remember the true run of events, while in *Undo* he finds a Bill Callahan-like stoicism. There's something about Michaelson's voice that always suggests a nearness – an intimacy perfect for the most confessional songs. This time it finds too a new warmth, the sound of a man who has at long last set down a heavy weight. ★★★★★

LAURA BARTON

Download: *Tides* | *No Other Way*

ON THE BRAIN

THE FAST SHOW



When it comes to capturing musical greatness on record, time is often of the essence, says VICTORIA SEGAL.



The speed of sound: The Beatles in 1962.

Next month, label Speedy Underground release their second annual compilation of singles recorded by producer Dan Carey in his South London studio. Among those included are Telemann, Kate Tempest and Loyle Carner, and post-punk mysticons FEWS. Carey's rules for recording are intimidating: a single will be recorded every two months and released as fast as possible; sessions will last one day and finish before midnight; and most terrifying of all, "there will be no lunch break during recording and mixing days." It sounds like the kind of regime that would come with the Mark E Smith stamp of approval: no messing about, no pandering to the creative ego, and certainly no indulgence in anything like food. The idea, says Speedy Underground's "10-point plan", is to "prevent over-cooking and faff".

Rapid direct action has a noble musical history. The Beatles recorded *Please Please Me* in 13 hours. Black Sabbath's debut album took one day. The Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat*, Hüsker Dü's *Zen Arcade* and Bob Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home* were all completed with barely the need for a change of clothes. Eric B & Rakim's *Paid In Full* saw the duo pulling 48-hour shifts to complete the album in under a week. At the other end of the spectrum, however, floats the bloated spectre of Guns N' Roses' *Chinese Democracy*, started in 1994, released in 2008, and weighed down by a \$13million price tag thanks to monthly salaries, studio rentals and instrument hire.

While lots of albums notorious for taking years to record probably didn't trouble their creators every minute of every "working" day – Kate Bush's *Aerial*, for example – Tom Scholz of rock monsters Boston spent a pretty relentless eight-year period recording their 1986 album *Third Stage*, guessing he had pressed "record" over a million times during the creative process. "Overcooking and faff" by anyone's definition.

Speed is generally caused by necessity – constraints of time and, above all, money – but it also suggests an emotional and creative urgency, the desire to bottle lightning, catch a mercurial moment. ☐

FROM THE BEATLES TO HÜSKER DÜ, RAPID DIRECT ACTION HAS A NOBLE HISTORY.

WORST IN SHOW



DAVID QUANTICK explains how to objectively spot the crappiest act of all time...



Morrissey: the greatest and the worst?

There's a lot of talk these days in our clickbait internet world about who is the Best and who is the Worst – particularly with bands. Polls and surveys litter the internet like scarves in a dressing-up box, all designed to prove once and for all that Band A or Singer Z is the greatest/worst act of all time. Of course, the problem with all these lists is that a) the answer to both is invariably, according to voters, Morrissey and b) they're all subjective. How can anyone objectively, like, prove that someone is the best or worst?

Well, proving the best is easy. It's generally a band or act who've done well both commercially and critically. So The Beatles, David Bowie, James Brown and Pet Shop Boys, say, will top their categories while The Tremeloes, Morrissey, Ian Brown and Boyzone, say, won't. It's simple. If you good, you good. Even

some twat saying he doesn't "get" why Paul McCartney is supposed to be a great songwriter will one day find himself whistling Live And Let Die and his nuts will fall off from the shame.

But how to find the worst? I mean, I loathe the goth-mod plod of The Stone Roses. I can point to their awful singing, their

leaden tunes and their weird demo-ey productions but I can't prove they're crap. Just as you can't prove that Little Mix are the worst pop act ever because a) they're not b) they're sort of OK and c) The Saturdays.

So here then are my objective criteria for working out who is the worst act of all time. One, they can't be successful. It's no good hating on Kanye West or Phil Collins because millions like their work and thus they succeed on their own terms. Two, they can't be critically lauded because not only does someone like them but also someone has argued a case for them. And three, they can't induce violent feelings, like hate or loyalty (which rules out Morrissey and his addled gimp army of fans). The worst act in the world must therefore be a friendless, hitless, unloved, unhated grey mulch of a cloud of nothingness.

And that act is...

You tell me.

EVEN SOME TWAT SAYING HE DOESN'T "GET" PAUL MCCARTNEY WILL FIND HIMSELF WHISTLING LIVE AND LET DIE...

MALCOLM MIDDLETON

SUMMER OF '13

NUDE, OUT 27 MAY

Former Arab Strap man goes poppy-ish.



After 2009's underwhelming Waxing Gibbous, Malcolm Middleton retreated into instrumentals with his Human Don't Be

Angry side-project and collaborations with David Shrigley on 2014's Music And Words. Now, he's back and he's more unashamedly poppy and dancey than he's ever been. At times, this record triggers the vision of Ivor Cutler fronting Pet Shop Boys, the barrage of synths and layered vocals making for a mostly exhilarating experience. For all that Middleton does wry as if to the wry manor born, he's at his best when he's at his straightest and the curiously affecting Big Black Hole and billowing Information In The Voice show how much hope there still is for him. ★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: Big Black Hole | Like John Lennon Said | Information In The Voice

MISTY MILLER

THE WHOLE FAMILY IS WORRIED

RELENTLESS/SONY, OUT NOW

Excellent long-awaited debut from rising South London singer-songwriter.



It's safe to say this is not the debut many expected from Misty Miller. When she first emerged in 2011, cooing beautifully over delicate ukulele

strums, she seemed set to follow the trajectory of Laura Marling. As the album title attests, the intervening years have seen Miller's music undergo a radical change: exit the folk songstress, enter the rock star. She pulls it off brilliantly by matching real lyrical bite with scratchy riffs, especially as she systematically details a list of self-sacrifices to an ex-lover on Next To You. That said, it's actually when she lets her alt-rock simmer down into a dream-pop haze on Fall Away that the richness of her voice really shines. Indeed, Miller may well be capable of nailing almost any genre she chooses. ★★

GEORGE GARNER

Download: Sugar To Me | Fall Away | Next To You

MOULETTES

PRETERNATURAL

CRAFT POP/REPUBLIC OF MUSIC, OUT 27 MAY

Nu-folkers take wrong turn on prog concept album.



Once associated with the same nu-folk scene that begat Mumford & Sons, Moulettes have far bigger ambitions on their fourth album. Based

around singer Hannah Millar's fascination

with the natural world, Preternatural stomps around like a mad electro-rock zoo bear. More prog than folk, songs about pufferfish, spiders and parasites switch from rock to jazzy rock with neither warning nor discernible purpose, cowbells ringing merrily as synths and guitars crash along in the background. Lob in some vaguely spiritual narratives possibly from the octopus's perspective, and it sounds like it was written during a Goan retreat rather than in a London home studio. "We are Moulettes," they might as well be saying. "We hope you like our new Goldfrapp direction." Not much. ★★

ANDY FYFE

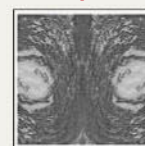
Download: Pufferfish Love

NECRO DEATHMORT

THE CAPSULE

ROCKET, OUT 3 JUNE

London-based noise chemists continue their experiments in disturbing sounds.



Necro Deathmort may have missed their true musical calling in life. For a few years now, the duo have been splicing

electronica and post-metal influences to such startling effect that their output often feels more suitable for a bleak sci-fi film soundtrack than a stand-alone album. While they still deliver brilliantly haunting compositions on The Capsule, this time they're equally focussed on pursuing uptempo beats on In Waves and melodic blips on Crux. They're far from failed experiments, but they do reinforce the notion that Necro Deathmort are much better at making atonal soundscapes. Indeed, the superbly unsettling Mono/Serum proves reminiscent of the most dissonant passages on James Horner's classic 1986 score for Aliens. Here Necro Deathmort remain a band in search of a film deal. Someone hire them already. ★★

GEORGE GARNER

Download: Mono/Serum | Pecklyn | Screens

ONDEADWAVES

ONDEADWAVES

MUTE, OUT 20 MAY

Dark and dusty gothic tales from London duo.



OnDeadWaves are a team-up between Mute labelmates Polly Scattergood and Maps' James Chapman, two

artists for whom the past decade has failed to pan out as their early individual promise suggested. Their collaborative debut pitches them as a noir-ish duo in thrall to Leonard Cohen, Nick Cave and all manner of American gothic imagery. Scattergood's fragile, Lana Del Rey-like vocal style is nicely complemented throughout by Chapman's husky whisper and reverb-heavy guitar soundscapes – and though there's



Yak: "rarely short of breathtaking."

A LOAD OF BULL

High-altitude thrills dominate rock'n'roll trio's debut.

little variation across the 10 tracks (bar the jaunty, jarring California), such is the all-enveloping moody atmosphere that you'll feel you've been happily stuck, dreamlike, in a David Lynch or Sergio Leone movie by the album's end. ★★

MATT YATES

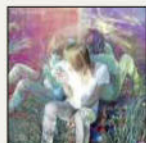
Download: Never Over | Dead Balloons | Hollow

BETH ORTON

KIDSTICKS

ANTI, OUT 27 MAY

Seventh album, but her first since moving West.



With her career yielding increasingly diminishing returns after six increasingly stagnant albums, Beth Orton took the nuclear option of

re-locating to California, while re-tooling her sound, albeit to an updated, expanded, more confident version of her bustling debut Superpinkymandy. Gone is the rather staid, singer-songwriterly approach of 2012's Sugaring Season in favour of a more adventurous, electro-based, Fuck Buttons-produced approach, which reminds us she was once William Orbit's muse. The opening Snow sets the template with its bubbling percussion, twisted guitar loops and wall of vocals. Nothing quite matches its shock and awe and there's some of the old water-treading in Falling, but there's menace in the repetition of "my tears well up and cry for you" on the spooked Petals and she's never sounded quite so otherworldly as she does on Corduroy Legs. ★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: Snow | Corduroy Legs | Petals



YAK

ALAS, SALVATION

OCTOPUS ELECTRICAL/

KOBALT, OUT 13 MAY

Not only too cool for school, but also for the myriad bands they've supported around London these past 12 months, this surly Wolverhampton/New Zealand trio major in feral ramalama rock'n'roll in the style of The Stooges. Onstage, lippy frontman Oli Burslem seethes with a volatile, love-him-or-loathe-him attitude, which often results in trashed equipment and audiences who are either palpitating with excitement, or puzzled – like, what's his problem?

There aren't any substantive answers to that conundrum on this debut album, but for now that's just fine, as Yak shoot from the hip with an impetuous first-timers' racket that's rarely short of breathtaking. The production from Pulp bassist Steve Mackey is no smoke-and-mirrors affair, simply capturing performances which showcase them at their full-blooded, energetic best.

Victorious (National Anthem) opens like a lost 1977 punk gem by The Vibrators, but then goes into a lunatic descending chorus – "vic-tor-ee-uusss!" – which encapsulates this band's uniquely lurching charm. Third up, Use Somebody's malevolent sax-enhanced cacophony could be slotted seamlessly onto Side Two of The Stooges' classic Funhouse. Countless trundlers have aimed in that direction over the years; few have succeeded as Yak do here.

That, however, isn't all Alas, Salvation is about. Burslem talks of their intention to dumbfound listeners with a "schizo record", and later tracks indeed toss out some curveballs. Take It ploughs a driftly groove recalling early-'90s Verve, while DooWah pulsates Phil Spector-via-The Strokes beat-pop, and Roll Another is stoned-immaculate campfire acoustica, humming with barely restrained feedback. It's that on-the-edge quality which thrillingly separates Yak from the numerous fakes in their field. ★★

ANDREW PERRY

Download: Victorious (National Anthem) | Use Somebody | Roll Another

PANTHA DU PRINCE

THE TRIAD

ROUGH TRADE, OUT 20 MAY

Electronic tour de force from Euro-techno polymath.



Seeking new surroundings while recording the follow-up to 2010's Black Noise, Hendrik Weber swapped the solitude of his Berlin apartment for a rural hideaway in southern Germany. Joined by New York producer Scott Mou and Norwegian

percussionist Bendik Kjeldsberg, Weber's trademark fusion of cascading chimes and subdued yet propulsive rhythm has expanded radically in scope. The ethereal shimmer of The Winter Hymn and the gauzy invocation of '90s shoegazing on Wallflower For Pale Saints evoke new sonic dimensions, while the cinematic flicker of Lions Love, a sonic tribute to nouvelle vague director Agnès Varda, shows there's even more to his music than meets the ear. ★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: The Winter Hymn | Lions Love | Wallflower For Pale Saints



Sturgill Simpson:
“trading traditionalism
for all-embracing
eclecticism.”

CROSSING THE LINE

Country music's bold new talent shakes things up.



STURGILL SIMPSON A SAILOR'S GUIDE TO EARTH

ATLANTIC, OUT NOW

Two years ago, even the title of Sturgill Simpson's second album, *Metamodern Sounds In Country Music*, shook Nashville traditionalists. Safe to say, most good ol' boys weren't too familiar with Vermeulen & van den Akker's post-postmodernism essay *Notes On Metamodernism* but, to be fair, few others were either.

Inside was hardly your average country album: instead of girls and trucks and beer, opening track *Turtles All The Way Down* referenced acid and aliens. One Grammy nomination later and 37-year-old Simpson now spearheads a cabal of young Nashville bucks reshaping country music, much like Johnny and Waylon and Merle and Kris kicked it in the butt two generations ago.

A Sailor's Guide To Earth is audacious in a

genre that prizes hat size over innovation, a concept album about parenting and childhood intended for consumption in one continuous sitting like a short story.

Inspired by his grandfather's letters home during WWII and regret at watching his own son grow up while he was on the road, even Simpson's rich baritone trades traditionalism for all-embracing eclecticism. It may echo Merle Haggard and Waylon Jennings, but he drags it through the Black Crowes-style country funk of *Keep It Between The Lines* and mixes pedal steel with Southern soul on *All Around You*. Frantic horns barrel through the Bakersfield sound of the anti-war *Call To Arms* like a shiny Stax tank, a cover of Nirvana's *In Bloom* opens the song up to gentle and tearful reflection, and the beautiful ballad *All Around You* updates Astral Weeks-era Van Morrison.

Metamodern... announced Simpson's intentions, but compared to this it was a mere calm before the storm. ★★ ★★

ANDY FYFE

Download: Breakers Roar | *Keep It Between The Lines* | *Brace For Impact* (Live A Little)

PLANTS AND ANIMALS WALTZED IN FROM THE RUMBLING

SECRET CITY, OUT 6 MAY

Fourth from kitchen-sink Canadians.



Unremitting enemies of minimalism, Plants And Animals define themselves on *Waltzed In From The Rumbling's* epic opener, *We Were*

One, where Radiohead angularity gives way to Kinks-style strumming, no-holds-barred gospel backing vocals, pre-Berlin Bowie shapeshifting and trim, tootling brass. It's not quite as messy as it threatens to be and, aided by Warren Spicer's warm, welcoming vocals, it soon takes mesmeric shape. Even when they scale things down on the early stages of *Je Voulais Te Dire*, they can't help themselves and throw in gargantuan piano chords and chopping Ennio Morricone-style guitars, while there's even funk in *Pure Heart*. The result is a sprawling epic, packed with ideas. Those ideas aren't all great, but the strike rate is remarkably high. ★★ ★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: *We Were One* | *Stay*

MARK PRITCHARD UNDER THE SUN

WARP, OUT 13 MAY

Ex-Global Communication man returns to his ambient roots.



Ambient, house, techno, jungle, drum'n'bass, grime, footwork: Mark Pritchard's CV reads like he's gone through all the dance sub-genres in a

record shop and had a go at each one. Here, the Australia-based Brit producer settles on something resembling peace, returning to the ambient electronica reminiscent of his '90s *Global Communication* project. *Under The Sun* resembles a less twisted *Boards Of Canada*, with four vocal collaborations breaking up the droning soundscapes. The stand-out is *Beautiful People*, which features a haunting Thom Yorke vocal over swirling, hypnotic keyboards. Other highlights tap into that soporific sound: ? has a captivating, slow build, while *Falling* sounds like Daft Punk being played backwards in a cave. It's an album that will send you to sleep, and to dreams of another dimension. ★★ ★

NIALL DOHERTY

Download: *Beautiful People* | *Falling* | *Under The Sun* | ?

SPOOKYLAND BEAUTY ALREADY BEAUTIFUL

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM, OUT 6 MAY

Florid debut from Sydney quartet.



They might show canny musical judgement, but Spookyland are also a lucky band. While other groups must scabble in the dust to find a USP,

theirs is built into their very fabric: singer Marcus Gordon's voice. A brassy, brittle alloy of Bob Dylan, Luna's Dean Wareham and Gordon Gano of The Violent Femmes (accents of Joanna Newsom, too), it might repel a large tranche of listeners. Those who tune in, however, will stay for their wine-lipped sense of drama, mordant lyrics and songs that walk a line between arena bluster and mortality-fixated, art-rock intelligence. There's Bruce Springsteen here, but there's also Lou Reed, R.E.M. and Destroyer. Unlike the singer, the songs need to project a little more, but Beauty Already Beautiful sounds an intriguing first note. ★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

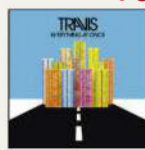
Download: Bulimic | Big Head | Turn

TRAVIS

EVERYTHING AT ONCE

RED TELEPHONE BOX, OUT NOW

Long-standing trad-rockers continue to exude easy-going charm.



Seventeen years after The Man Who made them superstars, Travis have long since resigned themselves to those heady days never

returning and doubtless, having sold over eight million records, they don't need them to. Instead 2016 finds them releasing another LP via their own Red Telephone Box label and continuing to enjoy a gentle late-career renaissance. Recorded in Berlin with songwriting contributions from Keane's Tim Rice Oxley, Everything At Once is an easy-going affair mixing typically clanging Fran Healey lyrics ("Sitting on a mushroom cloud/Waiting for the big fall out") with a rich array of effortless melodies (Animals, 3 Miles High, Magnificent Time). It might all sound as comfortable as an old cardigan feels but at this point, that seems fair enough. ★★★

JAMES OLDHAM

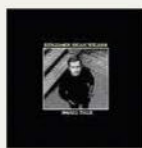
Download: 3 Miles High | Radio Song | Magnificent Time

BENJAMIN DEAN WILSON

SMALL TALK

TAPETE, OUT NOW

Oklahoma Renaissance man's wordy first effort.



Not one to do things by halves (or with anyone else), moustachioed mathematics student Ben Wilson played, wrote and produced everything

on his debut album. He may be a cottage industry, but his ambitions are skyscraper. These six tales showcase the desperate cast of characters Wilson creates, felled by crushed hopes – and in the case of Steve Green, the once-hip teacher (So Cool) – terrible self-awareness. The 14-minute closer Rick, I Tick-tock... is an epic involving a child bitten by a dog, a not-quite-adulterous picnic and illegal traffic manoeuvres, while Sadie And The Fat Man is a real heartbreaker. Mercifully, Wilson is a strong enough songwriter to ensure his melodically blessed sagas transcend mere pop poetry. Cultdom beckons, at least. ★★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: Rick, I Tick-tock... | Sadie And The Fat Man | So Cool

MARI WILSON

POP DELUXE

WG, OUT 13 MAY

Gloriously eccentric covers album from smartly retro singer.



After fame with brilliant singles such as Just What I Always Wanted and Cry Me A River, Mari Wilson – an '80s singer who was actually more '60s than

the '60s – disappeared to jazzier shores and stage musicals. But now the former Neasden



Travis: "sounding as comfortable as an old cardigan feels."

Queen Of Soul and her producer Alastair Gavin turn to pop with a collection of cover versions which is both commercial and idiosyncratic and manages, superbly, to meld electronics and nostalgia together perfectly. There are familiar choices – Sandie Shaw's Always Something There To Remind Me, Dionne Warwick's Anyone Who Had A Heart – but there are also more individual ones: nobody but Wilson could include both the Dusty Springfield/Pet Shop Boys collaboration In Private and '60s children's TV theme White Horses. And, for a singer whose early work was as camp as it was stylish, Mari Wilson has evolved into someone whose rendition of 24 Hours From Tulsa is as good as the very best versions. ★★★

DAVID QUANTICK

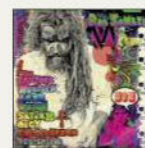
Download: 24 Hours From Tulsa | In Private | Anyone Who Had A Heart

ROB ZOMBIE

THE ELECTRIC WARLOCK ACID WITCH SATANIC ORGY CELEBRATION DISPENSER

UNIVERSAL, OUT NOW

The modern-day king of shock-rock returns for a sixth dispatch from Hell.



Whether it's in his career as a Hollywood horror director or arena-conquering rock star, subtlety has always been Rob Zombie's

favourite victim. And so it goes on The Electric Warlock Acid Witch Satanic Orgy Celebration Dispenser. It's an album that offers precisely zero surprises but lots of subversive entertainment as Zombie explores themes of shock, schlock and, in the case of Well, Everybody's Fucking In A.U.F.O., interplanetary shagging. Perhaps like no one else besides AC/DC, Zombie doggedly adheres to a strict musical formula, namely: colossal industrial stomp after stomp. It's silly, but that's the point. To that particular end, riotous songs such as Satanic Cyanide! The Killer Rocks On! are better than anything from his uninspired 2013 effort, Venomous Rat Regurgitation Vendor. Disengage your brain; you might just enjoy it. ★★★

GEORGE GARNER

Download: Wurdalak | Satanic Cyanide! The Killer Rocks On! | In The Bone Pile

MUST BUY

The essential new albums of the last few months

WEEZER

WEEZER CRUSH/ATLANTIC



The alt-rock geeks' 10th LP continues the return to form begun with 2014's Everything Will Be

Alright In The End. It's a summer's daydream of crunching rock and piano-assisted anthems, where infectious melody is omnipresent.

KENDRICK LAMAR

UNTITLED UNMASTERCED.

AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE



By turns angry, reflective and intensely personal, these demos from Compton

rapper Lamar are as enigmatic and enthralling as anything he's released since 2012's Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City.

ANOHN

HOPELESSNESS ROUGH TRADE



The former Antony Hegarty confronts the Big Issues on her new album.

Violence, misogyny, freedom and ecological destruction are tackled with lyrical candour, while backed by strange, hi-tech, sensual pop music of the highest order.

M83

JUNK NAIVE



Anthony Gonzalez, aka M83, has built a reputation for maximalist electro-pop, but this time

around he's feeling nostalgic, wrapping up a host of MOR guilty pleasures in one deeply uncool, uncoolly deep, magnifque package.



TRACK RECORDS

Dundee glam-poppers' brilliantly inventive music, now in Deluxivision.



ASSOCIATES

THE AFFECTIONATE PUNCH ★★★★★

FOURTH DRAWER DOWN ★★★

SULK ★★★★★

THE VERY BEST OF ★★★★★

BMG, OUT NOW

Most great guitarist/vocalist pairings are rightly celebrated – Morrissey and Marr, Anderson and Butler, McCulloch and Sargent – but too little is written about the pairing of Billy Mackenzie and Alan Rankine, both histrionic, both tameless, and both working in leaping unison like mad salmon. It would take a guitarist of immense personality to complement Mackenzie's voice, an instrument which wondered why David Bowie couldn't be even more operatic and then demonstrated it, but Rankine – guitar lines that sounded like angry barbed wire coming to an ominous decision – was a perfect foil to Mackenzie, as imaginative and uncorralled. The too-small clutch of albums that Rankine and Mackenzie made (here reissued and deluxed) illustrates their perfect combination, operatic hand in razor-mad glove.

THEY
COMBINED
AN
OPERATIC
HAND IN
A RAZOR-
MAD
GLOVE.

Astonishing live, the Associates struggled to display their controlled chaos on debut album *The Affectionate Punch*, but a remixed version and songs like the loping brilliance of *Logan Time*, the Russified empathy of *Even Dogs In The Wild* and the Bowie drama of the title track make this still an essential album and a snapshot of the band as their most guitarish.

Fourth Drawer Down is a collection of singles recorded in 1981, pop's oddest year. Tracks such as *Tell Me It's Easter On Friday* could be early Spandau Ballet, so blurred was the distinction between the indie charts and the pop charts. Mostly the collection illustrates the Associates' fascination (like everyone else at the time) with Berlin-era Bowie, with the distinction that nobody could sing like Mackenzie or play like Rankine. With



On your marks... Associates (from left, Michael Dempsey, John Murphy, Alan Rankine, Billy Mackenzie) in 1980: "a career of innovation and brilliance."

the emphasis on experiment and indulgence, *Fourth Drawer Down* sometimes seems to have too many songs called *White Car In Germany*, but it's always more entertaining than the laboratory it was intended as.

The gilded lion of the litter is *Sulk*, which came out in 1982, a perfect pop year when bands who'd previously played student unions and recorded Peel sessions suddenly discovered gold Letraset, shiny production and the charts. *Sulk* appears at first glance to be a pop album – and there are few greater pop singles than *Party Fears Two* – but its glossy sound and high budget disguise the fact that it's actually very odd. Titles such as *Bap De La Bap* and *Skiping* reveal the fact that *Sulk* is one of the strangest collection of weird songs ever to land on *Top Of The Pops*.

The golden age didn't last, sadly, and like all great guitarist/vocalist pairings, Mackenzie and Rankine parted company. As the later stages of the excellently compiled *Very Best Of* double CD indicates, Associates reunions were bitty (although there is the great Stephen, *You're Really Something*, an answer record to The Smiths' Mackenzie tribute, *William, It Was Really Nothing*) and Mackenzie was often better represented by solo records and collaborations. His suicide at 39 was an awful end to a career of innovation and brilliance. Rankine went on to teach music in Glasgow and work with Belle And Sebastian. These records are all we have now, and they're almost enough. DAVID QUANTICK
Download: *Logan Time* | *Party Fears Two* | *Stephen, You're Really Something*

From Glum To Glam

Three other great bedsit-to-bedroom wall bands



ABC

The Lexicon Of Love

NEUTRON, 1982
ABC had been industrial dance act *Vice Versa*, but a love of '60s pop and romance caused Martin Fry to hire Trevor Horn and a string section, buy a gold lamé jacket and croon his way into the charts.

★★★★★



The Teardrop Explodes Wilder

MERCURY, 1981
Julian Cope's Teardrop Explodes added Madness producers Langer and Winstanley to their Scott Walker-obsessed pop ideals to create this brassy chart dream.

★★★★★



Scritti Politti Cupid & Psyche 85

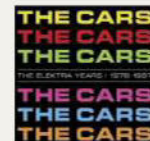
VIRGIN, 1985
Green Gartside's ex-squat dwellers and Marxist theorists embraced design, irony and the big-budget production tricks of the time for this Transatlantic hit. ★★★★★

THE CARS

THE ELEKTRA YEARS: 1978-1987

ELEKTRA, OUT NOW

US new wave prime movers, compiled.



The Cars were the height of US skinny-tie new wave, all angular moves, stylised vocals and synthed-up '60s pop. Main vocalist Ric Ocasek

had a talent for writing instant singles such as *My Best Friend's Girl* and *Let's Go*, while Queen producer Roy Thomas Baker (and later Mutt Lange) made everything reassuring for FM radio. Had it stopped there, we'd remember them as a superior Oingo Boingo or an American XTC, but The Cars are forever frozen in time because their single *Drive* was used over a montage at Live Aid. This box of six replica albums, from 1978's *The Cars* to 1987's *Door To Door*, charts their success and decline more than adequately. ★★★★★

DAVID QUANTICK

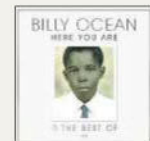
Download: *Just What I Needed* | *My Best Friend's Girl* | *Let's Go*

BILLY OCEAN

HERE YOU ARE: THE BEST OF

SONY MUSIC, OUT NOW

Finest moments and new covers set from the former Leslie Charles.



In 1976, Romford-Trinidadian Billy Ocean seemed destined to be a pop footnote with two hit singles (*Red Light Spells Danger* and *Love*

Really Hurts Without You) and several flop albums and singles to his name. By 1985, he was starring at American Live Aid and a global superstar with several worldwide Top 10 albums and singles to his name. As pop turnarounds go, it's hard to think of a more remarkable one. This 31-track collection is half newly recorded covers, half hits, including his three US Number 1s. The covers are grisly, but the hits show he was an adept and appealing popsmith. *Loverboy*, mostly the work of Robert John "Mutt" Lange, has a mighty thump, while Suddenly keeps threatening to break into Lionel Richie's *Hello*. The mystery deepens. ★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: *Loverboy* | *Red Light Spells Danger*

QUASI

R&B TRANSMOGRIFICATION ★★★★★ FEATURING "BIRDS" ★★★★★ FIELD STUDIES ★★★★★

DOMINO, OUT 10 JUNE

Portland spouses' first three, on vinyl.



Sam Coomes (once part of Heatmiser alongside Elliott Smith) and Sleater-Kinney drummer Janet Weiss were already divorced

by the time their Quasi project got around to making albums in 1997. Almost 20 years later, they're still an occasional proposition who record in each other's basements, but their opening blast was a tightly honed fusillade of harmonic, inventive, organ-laden indie-pop, which always aspired beyond their Portland ghetto. R&B Transmogrification (1997) is the most raw, 1999's Field Studies the most polished, but in-between Featuring "Birds" merged both strands to form their most fully-formed effort. Coomes's lyrics were aggressive, yet admirably courtly, and he's furiously rueful on You Fucked Yourself and apologetic on It's Hard To Turn Me On, while behind him, Weiss was always a controlled thunderdome.

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: *Ballad Of Mechanical Man | It's Hard To Turn Me On | I Never Want To See You Again*

TERRY REID

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER

FUTURE DAYS, OUT 20 MAY

Alternate take of an overlooked gem from one of British rock's premier voices.



By 1973, Terry Reid was an artist determined to take control. Given the self-determination he exhibited by declining Jimmy Page's invitation

to front the New Yardbirds (aka Led Zeppelin), the preternaturally gifted singer's first two albums had actually served his producer Mickie Most's demands more than his own. Reid's solution was to record River: seven magnificent tracks triangulating rock, folk and blues. Offering real historical cachet, The Other Side Of The River collects all the previously unreleased material from these artistically liberated sessions, comprising six unheard tracks and five alternate takes. Excluding the bloated Country Brazilian Funk, they all deserved salvaging. Things To Try works better in this tranquilized incarnation, while it's baffling how the resplendent Listen With Eyes was ever omitted. Both sides of this particular River demand attention. ★★★★★

GEORGE GARNER

Download: *Things To Try | Listen With Eyes | Funny*



The Replacements (Paul Westerberg, second left): "the aural equivalent of a knackered Converse trainer."

THE REPLACEMENTS

THE SIRE YEARS

RHINO, OUT NOW

US alt-rock pioneers' final four on limited-edition vinyl.



The Replacements often sounded like they might fall over, drunk, in the middle of playing a song – albeit in the nicest way possible.

These four albums (Tim, Pleased To Meet Me, Don't Tell A Soul and All Shook Down) showcase the flipside of '80s US rock. Yet their punk/college rock amalgam – the aural equivalent of a knackered Converse trainer – would become the boilerplate for several '90s bands, among them Nirvana; just listen to Left Of The Dial. The lovely war between Paul Westerberg's yearning voice and his bandmates' churning guitars is best experienced on 1985's Tim and 1987's Pleased To Meet Me. But both the slicker Don't Tell A Soul and All Shook Down aren't without merit. Full of great, drunk falling-down moments. ★★★★★

MARK BLAKE

Download: *Left Of The Dial | Alex Chilton | Bastards Of Young*

TUXEDOMOON

HALF-MUTE/GIVE ME NEW NOISE: HALF-MUTE REFLECTED

CRAMMED DISCS, OUT NOW

Eighties avant-classic in original and retooled versions.



Utilising jazzy, rambling violins, distorted Residents-style vocals, saxophone, Krautrock and as much mischief as menace, San Francisco's

Tuxedomoon were never destined for crossover, but they were destined to

influence generations of uncompromising noiseniks from Radiohead to The Knife. Hardly of its era back then, Half-Mute still baffles and inspires, but What Use? hints they could have gone pop had the mood taken them and the closer KM/Seeding The Clouds is an understated wall of wonder. The accompanying tribute album comprises new takes on Half-Mute and contemporary singles by far from famous friends and associates. It doesn't all work and some of the canvasses are just too blank, but electronica producer Norscq does all sorts of magical things with Tritone (Musica Diabla) and London duo Cult With No Name add gravitas to Loneliness. ★★★★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: *What Use? | KM/Seeding The Clouds | Cult With No Name – Loneliness*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

DAY OF THE DEAD

4AD, OUT 20 MAY

The National and friends' five-disc salute to the Grateful Dead.



With apologies to all genuine fans, being British and loving the Grateful Dead sometimes comes with the whiff of smart-arsery

and cultural tourism. This exhausting, 59-song tribute album is mostly populated by American artists, although Mumford & Sons fly the union flag with Friend Of The Devil. The line-up includes the project's organisers, Ohio indie standard-bearers The National, hard-bitten Southern folkie Lucinda Williams and Wilco. You knew Wilco would be on here, didn't you? There are gems, even for us ignorant Brits. The War On Drugs deliver an exquisite Touch Of Grey; garage-psych act Unknown Mortal Orchestra do the same on Shakedown Street and Minneapolis noise terrorists Marijuana Deathsquads deconstruct the Dead's revered road anthem Truckin'. But frankly, the best moments are the ones that – whisper it – don't sound anything like the Grateful Dead. ★★★★★

MARK BLAKE

Download: *The War On Drugs – Touch Of Grey | Marijuana Deathsquads – Truckin'*

MUST BUY *The essential reissues of the last few months*

ADAM AND THE ANTS

KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER SONY



It pitched the post-punk imaginers into the charts proper, yet Kings... is a peculiar record that bounces

between the joyfully idiosyncratic and the disconcertingly heavy. An outsider's rallying cry, which, 36 years later, is still impossible to resist.

METALLICA

RIDE THE LIGHTNING BLACKENED



The godfathers of thrash metal's second album revealed a band able to temper their own ferocity.

Now reissued with a host of extras, it stands not only as Metallica's finest, but also the very pillar upon which much of modern metal is built.

TRICKY

PRE-MILLENNIUM TENSION CHERRY RED



This claustrophobic 1996 follow-up to his debut, '95's coffee-table staple Maxinquaye, enabled

the Bristol maverick to bury the trip-hop tag for good. The hooks are still there; you just have to feel your way through the gloaming to get there.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

CLOSE TO THE NOISE FLOOR CHERRY RED



This brilliant four-disc, 61-track boxset of pioneering Brit electronica covers the period

1975-1984. The songs flow in and out of each other, making a grey, wistful music that sounds more like its era than punk ever did.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THE LADIES OF TOO SLOW TO DISCO

HOW DO YOU ARE? RECORDINGS, OUT NOW

Cheese-free sampling of female singer-songwriters.



As with Sean Rowley's Guilty Pleasures parties, German selector DJ Supermarkt's Too Slow To Disco series has rescued '70s soft rock

and pop disco from the bargain bin of history. His latest collection apparently has even more noble ambitions, aiming to elevate female artists sidelined by the era's chauvinism – though it's debatable whether they'd now appreciate being lumped together under the pub-landlord designation "ladies". Still, this is a superior selection which balances sunny Balearic gems by icons such as Rickie Lee Jones and Carly Simon with expertly picked highlights from previously neglected talents, including Evie Sands, with the lazily funky You Can Do It, and Leah Kunkel, the younger sister of The Mama & The Papas' Cass Elliot, who brings a touch of authentic heartache to Stevie Nicks-like slow-burner Temptation. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: Evie Sands – You Can Do It | Laura Allan – Opening Up To You | Leah Kunkel – Temptation

VARIOUS ARTISTS

WAKE UP YOU! THE RISE AND FALL OF NIGERIAN ROCK: 1972-1977 VOL.1

NOW-AGAIN, OUT NOW

Testament to nearly lost world of Nigerian psychedelic rock, funk and soul.



Despite the Vietnam War raging – and the battle for civil rights shaking up the US – for many in the West, 1967-1970 was a time of

relative peace and prosperity. You want to gobble hallucinogens and form a pop group? Go ahead! Meanwhile, as Nigeria suffered a brutal civil war, a hugely creative music scene developed, what happened in the fitful peace that followed is lovingly collected here. The country's psychedelic rock, funk and soul bands were making a totally new music, drawing on American, British and African influences, but still sounding out of this world. P.R.O's Tell Me is a snaking, multi-harmonied mind-bender, Question Mark's Scram Out is a super-loose funk epiphany, while Lagos schoolboys War-Head Constriction bring the doomy, Black Sabbath-ish drug-rock. Wake Up You! is a shining tribute to a near-forgotten world. ★★★★★

ROB FITZPATRICK

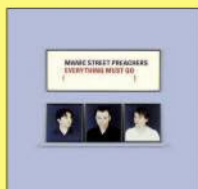
Download: Question Mark – Scram Out | P.R.O – Tell Me | War-Head Constriction – Graceful Bird | The Hykkers – Stone The Flower



Manic Street Preachers, 1996: "Everything Must Go didn't just speak for the masses – it spoke to them."

MASS APPEAL

Nineties rock's ultimate triumph over adversity, in a remastered, completist-bait box.



MANIC STREET PREACHERS EVERYTHING MUST GO

SONY MUSIC, OUT 20 MAY

There remains a strain of thought within

Manics fandom that the band's fourth album, released the year after the disappearance of Richey Edwards, represented a bridge too far, and that the three-piece Continuity MSP aren't even the same band as the four-piece early-'90s version.

Which is, frankly, horseshit. The notion of a neat post-Richey cut-off is a convenient fantasy. Edwards, after all, wrote five of Everything Must Go's 12 tracks, was present for the preliminary demos, and approved the Manics' new populist direction, a symphonic rock sound outlined by Mike Hedges as "a produced trashiness".

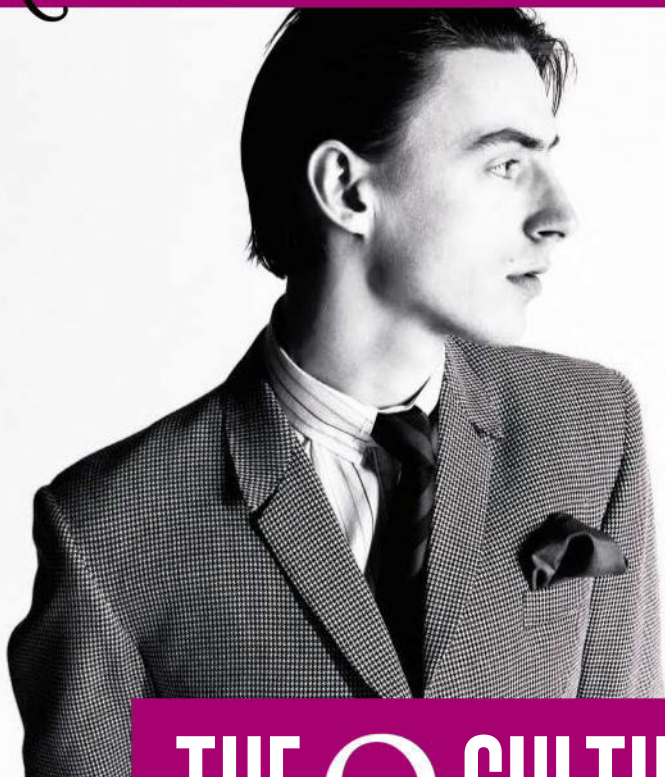
Things Everything Must Go is not: a Year Zero, a tabula rasa, a burning of the fields. Despite its title track's desire to be "free from our history", it is in many respects a direct negative image of, and inseparable companion piece to, its predecessor The Holy Bible.

In its own way, Everything Must Go is as unsettling. Opening track Elvis Impersonator, Blackpool Pier begins with the lapping of water (a queasy sound, given Edwards's last known location) and exudes a feeling of eerie, Mickey-Mouse-has-grown-up-a-cow wrongness. Small Black Flowers That Grow In The Sky, a harp-based beauty, has Edwards identifying with an animal suffering from zoochosis. Elsewhere are references to genocide, suicide, Sylvia Plath, agoraphobia and Alzheimer's disease. Its magnificent lead single quotes the gates of Auschwitz in its second line. A Design For Life is described by Nicky Wire, in the accompanying Kieran Evans film Freed From Memories, as "a reaction against Parklife Britain and the patronisation of the working classes".

But more than any Manics record before or since, Everything Must Go didn't just speak for the masses – it spoke to them. Mission accomplished, in the most challenging of circumstances. Viewed at two decades' distance, what catches the light is not cheap, tarnished glitter but the glint of steely resolve. ★★★★★

SIMON PRICE

Download: A Design For Life | Enola/Alone | Small Black Flowers That Grow In The Sky



Suits you, sir! Paul Weller looks back in style.

Book
AIM HIGH:
PAUL WELLER IN
PHOTOGRAPHS
1978-2015

Tom Sheehan
FLOOD GALLERY, £56

The changing man's
pictorial biography.

Former Melody Maker and Q/MOJO photographer Tom Sheehan has been documenting Paul Weller's ever-changing taste in shoes and hairstyles since 1978. While the iconic Jam shots are the more recognisable ones here, it's the lesser seen stuff that's most intriguing, particularly from the Style Council era. Changing his socks before a show, having a fag with Time Bandits actor David Rappaport at a CND rally, chatting to Joe Strummer at Copenhagen airport in 1985. Weller provides an intro to the book and one wonders what his thoughts today are on some of these moments. Quite what possessed him to match a suit jacket, loafers with tiny shorts before taking to the stage at Roskilde Festival, for instance? ★★★★★

CHRIS CATCHPOLE

THE Q CULTURE LIST

The Modfather's career in pictures, Moby gets saucy, a revelatory Janis Joplin doc and why dads rock.

Book
MOBY

Porcelain
FABER & FABER, £14.99

Sex, drugs and veganism in
the dance man's early years.

For a time at the start of the new millennium, Moby's hybrid of ambient, electronic beats and blues samples made him huge. Many of his songs would go on to soundtrack mystic waterfalls on shampoo ads. Before that, though, he was a struggling electronic artist who split a life of hard partying and poverty with Bible readings and a vegan diet that revolved around oats. This memoir focuses on the 10 years in the run-up to his breakthrough album Play, which he treated as a swansong, assuming its failure would lead to him being dropped from his record label. It's a funny and insightful read, despite the fact that it contains one too many descriptions of Moby's sexual escapades. But if you feel you can shift the mental image of Moby dancing in his own "juices", go right ahead. ★★★★★

NIALL DOHERTY



"Debilitating sensitivity":
Janis Joplin.

DVD
JANIS: LITTLE GIRL BLUE

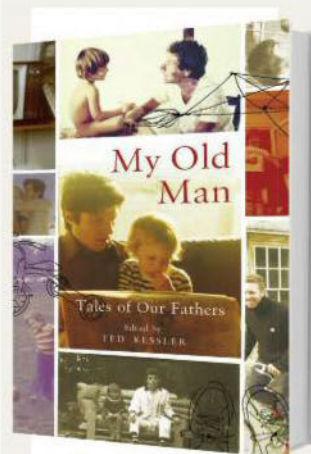
A magnificent portrait of a
remarkable life cut short.

CERT 15, OUT 9 MAY

So deeply ingrained is Janis Joplin's story in rock and "27 Club" mythology, you could be forgiven for thinking there's little left to illuminate. This beautiful documentary from Oscar-nominated director Amy J Berg proves otherwise. The insights gathered here from family, friends and collaborators sharply define the debilitating sensitivity that charged both her inimitable talent and the substance abuse

that claimed her life. The accompanying archival footage is similarly gripping, whether capturing the awestruck audience reaction to Joplin's phenomenal wails at 1967's Monterey Pop festival or her "Huck Finn" innocence being besieged by fame. Berg's best directorial manoeuvre, however, is including recitations of her letters. In these pained, yet eternally hopeful dispatches from the troubled frontline of her mind, this film gracefully lets Joplin tell her own story. ★★★★★

GEORGE GARNER



Book
MY OLD MAN: TALES
OF OUR FATHERS

Editor: Ted Kessler
CANONGATE, £14.99

Rod Stewart, Chris
Martin, Tilda Swinton
and more discuss
their paterfamilias.

Overseen by Q's Ted Kessler, My Old Man began life as a blog in 2013. This book version contains 39 personal stories, several by famous musicians or written by their offspring. These tales are poignant, funny and sad, but always compelling, because reading about other people's families invariably helps you make sense of your own. Rod Stewart talks about his mum burning his father's football boots after he broke his leg during a kickabout on Christmas Eve; Ian Dury's daughter, Jemima, recalls a dull New Year's Eve in which she and her old man bond over a lump of dope that turns out to be tarmac; while Richard Hawley's account of being gently put in his place by his smart, hip steelworker dad is probably the best story in the book. An inspired, uplifting read. ★★★★★

MARK BLAKE



THE ONE
TO BUY!

HEAR THIS!

A pair of “sentient” headphones, another problematically named piece of kit, the portable/non-portable speaker debate heats up and Q’s reviewer takes this chance to ask your forgiveness. By NIAL DOHERTY...

← AUDIO-TECHNICA ATH-MSR7BK £179

Audio-Technica are very serious about hi-res audio, and they name all their products like Star Wars droids. The ATH-MSR7BK covers a wider frequency range than regular headphones, going from 5Hz to 40kHz, and while I have no idea what that means, I can testify that they fit very snugly on my ears and make the new Skepta single *Konnichiwa* sound like it’s using my ears as a punchbag. Which is nice. ★★★★★

HOW WE TESTED

Q’s Niall Doherty reviewed the products at his desk, with a third of the testing taking place with no jumper on, and two-thirds of testing taking place with a jumper on.

HOW WE RATED

Products were rated for ease of use, sound and how they looked. Basically all the things you shouldn’t judge humans by, but it’s OK to judge gadgets by. Because they’re not real, apart from the Audio-Technica headphones, who are sentient.



↑ CAMBRIDGE AUDIO, MINX XI £400

Another month, another problematically named gadget. Imagine the scene. You’ve bought this superlative digital music system, and you want to show it off to a friend. “Come round,” you say, “I’ll turn on my Minx.” The friend doesn’t come round. The friend stops returning your calls. The friend spreads vicious rumours about you. But at least you’ve got your flash new hi-fi to play with. ★★★



↑ STELJES AUDIO NS3 £199

Portable speakers are great but then you go to play some music and the speaker is in another room and your kids are pretending it’s a giant mobile phone and then portable speakers aren’t so great. Steljes Audio, a brand that sounds like a cop in a Scandi TV show, is an audio offshoot of an old UK company. This is their introduction, a pair of Bluetooth speakers. The sound is great and they look snazzy. Portable is soooo last year. ★★★★★



↑ RIVA AUDIO RIVA S £199

Oh, this portable speaker is just fantastic! Portable speakers are back in! This Bluetooth speaker has a 300° sound field that’s beefy and superior to larger speakers out there. Also, it has a multi-user Bluetooth option, which is something I’d never really thought about before because I like to make sure no one else can control the music in the house but it’s quite a good idea if you’re a rational human being. ★★★★★



↑ SONOS PLAY:1 £160

Back in 2013, I reviewed Sonos speakers and didn’t like them. I’ve since realised the error of my ways. I hold my hands up and say, “I am a plank and thank you God Of Gadgets for giving me the chance of redemption.” This is an updated reissue of their original multi-room speaker, which has wonderful sound and a huge list of streaming services. There’s still no Bluetooth, which is what annoyed me first time, but I’m over it. ★★★★★



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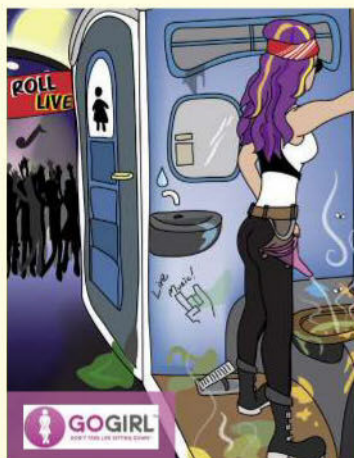
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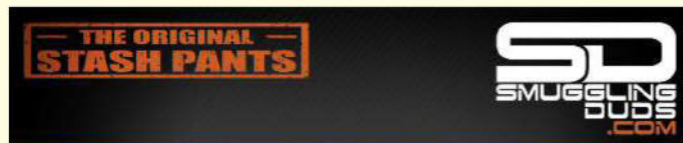
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LETTER OF THE MONTH



GRUNGE, GLORIOUS GRUNGE!

Dear Q, I really enjoyed your grunge special last issue – great stories, great pictures and a real insight into how this small, incestuous scene in Seattle back in the mid-'80s blew up into something that seduced the world. As Sub Pop label boss Jonathan Poneman once said, “When the right thing collides with the right time, you never know what’s going to happen...” Let’s hope that happens again soon...

Jenny Wiley, via Q Mail

Scene setters:
Nirvana and grunge cohorts “seduced the world.”

TITFER TAT

As a hat lover, I was most impressed by the fine array of headgear on display in your last issue. Cate Le Bon, Jack Garratt, James Bay... all good, but none, however, compare to Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder and Jeff Ament in the early '90s, as featured in your grunge special [Q359]. Sartorial excellence, IMHO...

G Bradley, via Q Mail

WHISKERS A-GO-GO

Dear Q, I very much enjoyed the last issue, but was a bit put out by Jack Garratt’s refusal to talk about his beard. As a fuzz-wearer myself (I am *not* a hipster, but sport a “Garibaldi”, similar to Jack’s, though less trimmed), who often gets ridiculed for it, I think us follically-proud men should stand tall and stick together, speaking up for our right to style the hair on our faces any way we like! And as for Jack’s comment about, “All

the women I’ve ever met in my life have hair on their faces...”, well, you have to wonder what sort of “women” he’s been meeting? Do they work in the circus or something? Anyway, keep up the good work, Q, and more beards, please.

Andrew Glynn, Cambridge

RAPPERS DELIGHT

Dear Q, Regarding last month’s issue on the golden age of hip-hop [Q357], which I thought was great, I feel that Scarface and Willie D of the Geto Boys also deserve recognition considering they wrote Bushwick Bill’s lyrics. I consider the Geto Boys to be pioneers of Southern hip-hop,

so they both deserve an honourable mention at least?

George Whitmore, via Q Mail

SPINE MESSAGE Q359

“Spencer” Elden was the naked baby on



The World of Q
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Tony Wernham, Scott’s Hut, near Mount Erebus, Ross Island, Antarctica



Marissa Marabe, somewhere over the pagodas, Bagan, Myanmar



Martin Spanswick, The Perhentian Islands, off Malaysia

Caption Competition

WIN! T in the Park tickets!

Thanks to festival organisers DF Concerts and founding partner Tennent's Lager, we have FOUR VIP weekend camping tickets for T in the Park from 8 to 10 July to give away. One of those winners will also receive some vouchers for the Be Chilled service, where you can pre-order chilled cans of Tennent's Lagers and Magners Original Cider!

What is T in the Park? It is 20-plus years of musical history. It's finding your spot on the campsite, surrounding yourself with friends, that first sip of Tennent's Lager once your tent has been pitched. It's anticipation hanging in the air as your favourite artist walks onstage; that feeling part of something bigger amid the 80,000 strong crowd. It's that "in-the-



Park life: the legendary T in the Park stage and (inset) one of the headliners, The Stone Roses.

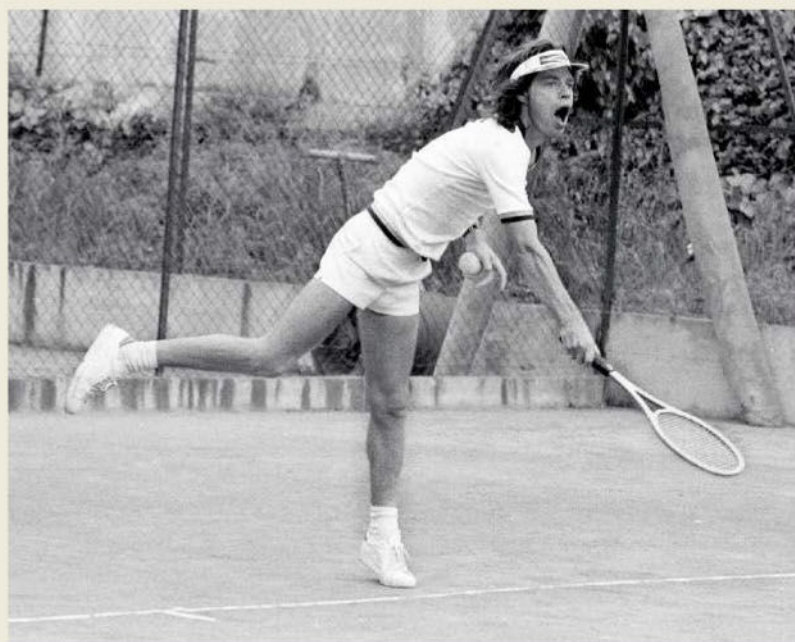
moment" experience as you sing your heart out to this year's headliners The Stone Roses, Calvin Harris and Red Hot Chili Peppers, plus many more of modern music's greatest acts. It's making friends for life, and memories to last a lifetime. It's T in the Park.

For a perfect festival weekend check out Tennent's Lager's popular Be Chilled service, where you can pre-order chilled cans of Tennent's Lagers and Magners Original Cider at www.tennents.com/bechilled. See below for Ts and Cs.

■ For tickets, info and regular updates, visit www.tinthePark.com.



BE CHILLED



◀ THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CHALLENGE

Here's Mick Jagger showing off his sporting prowess. Send your entry – the funnier the better – including your address, to captioncomp@Qthemusic.com or on a postcard to the usual Q address. See below for more details. Closes: 30 May 2016



▲ Q358 THE WINNING CAPTION

"Look at our balls, see how they shine for you. And they are all yellow..."

Charlotte Gingel from Twickenham came up with this gem and wins tickets to the Isle Of Wight Festival. Other winners: Scott Daly from Swansea; Paul Thomas from Cardiff; Nicky Stevens from Ryde.

To win, email your caption to: captioncomp@Qthemusic.com or post to the usual Q address before 30/05/16. Four winners will be chosen by the panel. Winners will be notified, by email, 7-10 days after the closing date and must respond to Q within 14 days or another winner may be chosen. Q will not respond to questions about its chosen winner but will provide winners' names and the home towns, provided a request is made to the usual Q address and accompanied with a SAE. One entry per person and you must be over 18 and live in the UK. For facts about alcohol, visit drinkaware.co.uk. Prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Personal data will be collected by Q and passed to prize provider to process entries. See <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/> for more details. Full T&Cs apply, see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>. Any queries, email: QMail@Qthemusic.com

the cover of Nevermind [a reference to Q359's Kurt Cobain cover]. Thankfully, he put some clothes on when he recreated the picture 20 years later.

Julian Butler, via Q Mail;
Rob Grew, via Q Mail;
Steve Loraine, Maidstone

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

I'd like to complain about your Freeze Frame in the last issue [Q359]. For someone to say it looks like The Smiths' Andy Rourke has got a "rabbit" down his trousers in



"Is that a guinea pig down your trousers...?"

the Salford Lads Club photo has ruined that iconic photograph for me forever! Though now of course I can't stop looking at it, wondering what he might've stuffed down there. I'm saying it looks more like a guinea pig! Lloyd Brady, via Q Mail

ALISON MOSSHART "I WAS DRINKING TEQUILA AND INJURED MYSELF TRYING TO DO JU-JITSU..."

**The Kills/Dead
Weather singer
on the perils of
drunken close
combat, bad
manners and
crashing Dad's car...**

The Kills' Alison Mosshart: do not accept a lift in this woman's car!



W

When did you last cook a meal for someone?

Um, shit *[laughs]*! It was probably a month ago when I cooked pesto pasta for my room-mate and it wasn't that good. The pesto came out of a metal tube and it was kind of disgusting *[laughs]*! Did she like it? She loved it! As you politely say you do when someone cooks a meal for you.

When did you last swear at the TV?

Oh, probably during some Republican rally or something... actually, it was when Brussels got bombed, and it was more of a crying swearing. But generally I don't really watch TV.

When did you last hang out with Jack White?

At my home about three-and-a-half weeks ago. We had a party to celebrate my mother's 70th birthday and The Kills and The Dead Weather played – the house didn't fall down which was something we were very concerned about. Did everyone behave themselves? Well, I was the only one who ended up injured because I decided at three in the morning I knew how to do ju-jitsu and I don't. I'd been drinking out of a tequila bottle straight and thought I was a superhero. I fell really hard on a brick porch and sprained my knee so I've been limping ever since. It's my new thing and it's really cool *[laughs]*!

When did you last get thrown out of a hotel?

Er... a really long time ago, during the making of the No Wow record *[2004]*. Jamie *[Hince, Kills guitarist]* and I were making a video in the

middle of the night when nobody was around and he was dragging me by my hair down this marble hallway and the hotel security caught us. They weren't very happy about it so they kicked us and the camera crew out.

When was the last time someone was rude to you?

Well, pretty much every time I go to London. You know, just the general kind of vibe. Coming from Nashville where everyone is so over-the-top polite, which is really nice, and then you go to London and hold the door open for like a woman with a pram and she sort of spits on you, pissed that you're trying to help, and it's a bizarre thing. But, you know, after a week of being there you kind of get used to it and start walking around with clenched fists and just fitting right in *[laughs]*!

When did you last break the law?

Oh, last night. Just speeding. I drove home

from a restaurant at 100mph and it felt really good because there was no one on the road. I frame all my speeding tickets because I think you have to make light of these things.

So, when did you last crash your car?

I had a really big crash when I was about 20 years old. I was in my hometown *[Vero Beach in Florida]*, and my dad had lent me his car. I was driving around listening to these demos that Jamie and I had made, you know, really rocking out in the car, and I turned down a one-way road the wrong way and suddenly drove into six lanes of on-coming traffic. I hit this Cadillac and as I spun around it I smashed every side of it and ended up in the front yard of a flower shop. I totalled both cars and it was super-scary but, amazingly, nobody was hurt. Lucky! 🍀

■ The Kills' new album, *Ash & Ice*, is out 3 June on Domino.

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